Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

https://archive.org/details/compoundedintere0000reyn

Mack Reynolds

Compounded Interests

THE NESFA PRESS
BOX G, MIT BRANCH P.O.
CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139-0910
1983

COPYRIGHT © 1983 BY MACK REYNOLDS
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. NO PART OF THIS BOOK MAY BE REPRODUCED IN ANY FORM OR BY ANY ELECTRONIC OR MECHANICAL MEANS INCLUDING INFORMATION STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL WITHOUT PERMISSION IN WRITING FROM THE PUBLISHER, EXCEPT BY A REVIEWER WHO MAY QUOTE BRIEF PASSAGES IN A REVIEW.

FIRST EDITION

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NO. 82-62697

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BOOK NO.:
0-915368-20-X (REGULAR EDITION)
0-915368-82-X (SLIPCASED EDITION)

Copyright Acknowledgments

Introduction, copyright © 1983 by Mack Reynolds.

"Idealist", copyright © 1983 by Mack Reynolds.

"Give the Devil His Due", copyright © 1950 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company; originally published (as by "Dallas Ross") in *Fantastic Adventures*, October 1950.

"Psi Assassin", copyright © 1967 by the Condé Nast Publications Inc.; originally published in *Analog*, August 1967. This version also contains material first published in *Section G: United Planets*, copyright © 1976 by Mack Reynolds.

"Last Warning", copyright © 1953 (as "The Galactic Ghost") by Love Romances Publishing Co., Inc.; originally published in *Planet Stories*, March 1954.

"Despression or Bust", copyright © 1967 by the Condé Nast Publications Inc.; originally published in *Analog*, August 1967. This version also contains material first published in *Depression or Bust*, copyright © 1974 by Mack Reynolds.

"Compleated Angler", copyright © 1955 by Fantasy House, Inc.; originally published in *Startling Stories*, Fall 1955.

"Pacifist", copyright © 1963 by the Mercury Press, Inc.; originally published in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, January 1964.

"The Adventure of the Snitch in Time" (by Mack Reynolds and August Derleth), copyright © 1953 by Fantasy House, Inc.; originally published in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, July 1953.

"Doctor's Orders", copyright © 1951 (as "Four-Legged Hotfoot") by Best Books, Inc.; originally published in *Fantastic Story Magazine*, Winter 1952.

"Good Indian", copyright © 1962 by the Condé Nast Publications Inc.; originally published in *Analog*, September 1962.

"Compounded Interest", copyright © 1956 by Fantasy House, Inc.; originally published in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, August 1956.

"Three Unanswerable Questions", copyright © 1983 by Mack Reynolds.

THIS IS COPY NUMBER 960 OF 1000,
THE FIRST 200 BEING THE SLIPCASED EDITION

To Jeanette

Who sacrificed two years of her youth, working as a fry cook, to enable me to be an apprentice and become a science fiction writer.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following people for their assistance in producing this book. First and foremost, George Flynn, whose researching, cataloguing and ineffable proof-reading were invaluable. The MIT Science Fiction Society, for the use of their archives. D. Christine Benders, our designer. Rick Katze, who drew up the book contract and helped type. Jim Turner, our head typist and computer hacker, and the rest of our nimble fingered typing staff: Mark Olson, Alexis Layton, Tom Galloway, Sharon Sbarsky, Jodi Hitchcock, Bob Knowlden and Wendell Ing. The many NESFA members who rated stories in helping to select the book's contents, and proof-read the finished book. And finally, Chip Hitchcock, my mentor and assistant editor, whose patience was worn thin at times by innumerable questions from a neophyte editor, just learning the trade.

Greg Thokar, Editor
Cambridge, Mass.
December 1, 1982

Contents

Introduction	ix
Idealist	3
Give the Devil His Due	21
Psi Assassin	29
Last Warning	51
Depression or Bust	61
Compleated Angler	87
Pacifist	95
The Adventure of the Snitch in Time	113
Doctor's Orders	123
Good Indian	139
Compounded Interest	147
Three Unanswerable Questions	161

Introduction

WELL SIR MAN AND boy I've sailed the Seven Seas of Science Fiction since 1949 However, I've been living abroad since 1953 and hence never expected to be called upon to be a Guest of Honor at such conventions as Boskone Nevertheless, of recent years such colleagues as John Brunner have been crossing the Atlantic so often that I suspect there's a bridge And Art Clarke must own controlling interest in Sri Lanka Airlines, he shuttles back and forth with all the verve of a whirling dervish in a revolving door So why can't they bring Mack Reynolds up from Mexico?

And the question the other pros will be asking at this point is, "Why have you been an expatriate for the past thirty years?"

And the answer is, "Why haven't you been?"

And this is the story.

When I returned from the South Pacific, following the Second War, I sat around for a few weeks waiting for a job To kill time (which is

said to be suicide rather than murder). I wrote my first story a short-short detective. I had done some newspaper work before the war but never any fiction. The story sold, first time out, to *Esquire*.

Obviously, I was a writer born and not only a writer but a slick writer at that. However, I soon found that I wasn't able to write in my spare time after working hours. It had to be a full-time operation.

During my first vacation, I knocked out some more detective stories and sold two of them to *Detective Story Magazine*, then tops in the field. I was more convinced than ever. Give me freedom to serve an apprenticeship and in no time flat I'd be tearing up the literary pea patch.

Jeanette got tired of my pouting. Finally she said, "Listen. I'll support you for two years. If at the end of that time you're not making a living at writing, then you'll promise to shut up and go back to working for IBM."

For six months I didn't sell a thing. Then we moved to the art colony of Taos in New Mexico for the climate and cheap living. There were several writers in town, including the late Fredric Brown. He took me under his wing.

Soon, my secret sin was revealed.

He looked at me in astonishment. He said, "You mean to tell me that you try to write detective stories all day and then at night you read science fiction for relaxation? Look, do you like to read mysteries?"

"Not especially, but they're the biggest market of all the pulps. Science fiction has been my cup of tea since I was a kid."

He closed his eyes and shook his head in pain. "Listen, Mack," he said. "You throw those detective stories in your wastebasket and start writing science fiction."

That was in June. By the end of the year I had placed eleven pieces. In 1950 I sold thirty-five more sf and fantasy stories and an article entitled "Some of My Best Friends Are Martians," to *Writer's Digest*. My first novel, a hardcover entitled *The Case of the Little Green Men*, was published in the spring of the next year.

My two years were up. I was selling regularly, but in those days you seldom got more than a cent and a half a word and often it was only a penny. In short, I wasn't making a living.

Jeanette took pity and extended the period she'd support me to

another year But at that time I still wasn't making enough to live on *in the United States.*

And this is what I've been building up to

We moved down to the Spanish Colonial town of San Miguel de Allende in the mountains of Guanajuato. First settled in 1541, San Miguel is both an art colony and, because of its beauty and historical connotations, a Mexican National Monument There are no service stations, no supermarkets or other large stores, no traffic lights, no parking meters, no electric signs, neon or otherwise The streets are cobblestoned and it is illegal to build any modern buildings within the city limits You have to get a permit from the city fathers to make any change or alteration whatsoever in your house

And our budget, at that time, was about $125 a month On that we rented a mansion of a house, furnished with Spanish Colonial antiques ($32 a month), and kept two full-time maids and shared a gardener with a neighbor.

Prices were unbelievably low A martini in *La Cucharacha*, the local hangout of the foreign colony, was 15¢ and a bottle of the excellent Mexican beer, 12¢ We bought our rum and tequila in gallon jugs for about a dollar a jug Year around fresh vegetables and tree ripened tropical fruits were practically free Can you believe a large ripe pineapple for 5¢?

Oh, it was cheap all right, but we were soon to find out that so were Spain, Morocco, Greece and Austria After eighteen months in Mexico I got a job as travel editor of Bill Hamling's *Rogue*

I spent eleven years in Europe, North Africa and the Near and Far East About seventy five countries in all Many of my SF stories are based on material I accumulated as I roved

So that's the reason for Reynolds becoming and remaining an expatriate The United States is one of the most expensive countries in the world But an American *writer* doesn't have to live there He can seek out a cheap beautiful, climatically inviting area and mail his manuscripts back to his agent in New York Harry Harrison and others have been doing it for years in Ireland Britisher Arthur Clarke has done the same in Sri Lanka, one of the most beautiful islands in the world

But it's San Miguel for me I've returned there Over the years a good many other SF writers have enjoyed its beauty for varying

lengths of time. Offhand, I can think of Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore, Mick McComas, Fredric Brown, Ted Cogswell, Tom Disch, Joe Haldeman, Dwight Swain, Robert Sheckley, Kingsley Amis (who came for one night to visit us and stayed for several months), Katherine MacLean, Roger Zelazny, John D. MacDonald, David Van Arnam, Neal Barrett, Patrice Duvic, Greg Benford, Aldous Huxley and Gary Jennings.

Is it still as cheap as ever? No. No place is. However, I would estimate that it would cost me at least twice as much to live at my present standard of living (complete with a maid and a handyman gardener) in the cheapest area of the United States I could find. I bought my present house, the original rooms of which were built before the Pilgrims landed in New England, for $8000. We've put in electricity and plumbing, of course, and I doubt if you could buy a similar house for $100,000 in California, Arizona, New Mexico or Texas, where somewhat similar architecture is to be found.

So that's why a writer becomes an expatriate. I can recommend it to any new aspiring scribbler who hasn't thus far completely "arrived."

Mack Reynolds

COMPOUNDED INTERESTS

This is one of those stories where you get the basic idea, sit down and write the whole thing in one session and finish off the final draft the next day. So I got to wondering, one coffee break, what ever happened to the hero of My Lai? And the story wrote itself. The protagonist is Rex Bader, the "Last of the Private Eyes". He's appeared in various novels and serials, the last Lagrange Five *(Bantam). But this is almost the only short he's been in. It takes place in the year 2000, in keeping with the theme of this convention (Boskone XX), and has never been published elsewhere.*

Idealist

THE FACE ON THE identity screen was an unknown. A stoical-looking cove probably somewhere in his early fifties. A no-nonsense type.

Rex Bader hadn't had a case for so long that it almost didn't occur to him that this might be one. He went to the door, opened it and looked at the other inquiringly.

"Bader?" the newcomer said flatly.

"That's right. What can I do for you?"

The other brought a wallet from an inner pocket and flicked it open in the time-hallowed manner.

"All right," Rex said. "So you've got a buzzer and your name is Warren Petersen and your rank is lieutenant in the IABI. Where do we go from here? What could the Inter-American Bureau of Investigation want with me?"

"A talk," Petersen said.

Rex shrugged and led the way back into his mini-apartment. There was a couch which converted into a bed at night, one

comfortable chair and another straight chair at the built-in desk. His visitor took the chair and looked about the small ultra-efficient room. One door opened off into a tiny kitchenette-cum-dining nook, another to what was obviously a bath. The whole establishment was about the size of a small house trailer.

He brought his attention back to Rex. "The last of the private eyes doesn't seem to be doing so well."

Rex inwardly winced at the appellation. "I doubt if I'm the very last but near enough to it. At least it keeps me off NIT most of the time."

"Why should you want to keep off Negative Income Tax? By the looks of things, you'd probably be just as well off and you wouldn't have to do what little work you seem to get."

Rex sighed. "Because I'm not a bum. Three quarters of the country may have been automated and computerized out of their jobs but, one way or the other, I'm going to find something to do to make my living."

"Well, you'd better start looking for something else, Bader because it looks as though you're about to lose your license." The other's face was expressionless. He added, "And you might even wind up in the banger."

Rex stared at him. "What in the hell are you talking about? All I am is a private investigator and there's practically no jobs left for such. No more divorce work because nobody seems to get married any more. Practically no crime because in our checkless, cashless exchange system there's no money. It's all handled through the National Data Banks. You can't even get a job any more as a fink scabbing on striking workers. There aren't any striking workers because for all practical purposes workers have been automated out of existence. So what could I possibly have done to get my license lifted?"

"Have you heard about Lieutenant William Daley?"

"What about him?"

"He's dead."

The private detective stared at him again. "It hasn't been in the news. What happened to him?"

"It seems as though it's being hushed up for the time. Our hero of Vietnam was gunned down on his porch. Shotgun. Buckshot. Double load of it."

"Holy smog. In this day and age? But what's it got to do with me?"

"You fingered him."

"Are you completely around the bend, Petersen?"

"No. Do you know what the date is?"

"March 17th."

"That's right, and yesterday was the 16th and the twentieth anniversary of the sentencing of Lieutenant William Daley to life imprisonment for the murder of twenty-two South Vietnamese, innocent villagers in a town on our side. Old men, women and children who had nothing to do with the Viet Cong. The men he commanded finished off more than a hundred others. His life sentence had been reduced to twenty years and after a couple of years in minimum-security imprisonment, in fact in luxury imprisonment including booze and women, the whole trial was overturned and he was set free."

"I didn't finger him. This is the first I knew about his death."

The older man looked at him skeptically. "Tell me all you know about Daley, Bader. And it'd best be good."

"All I know about him was that about three months ago a reporter from the *Times-Tribune* gave me a minor assignment. He wanted to locate Daley to interview him. He said he periodically did a column called 'Where Are They Now?' Evidently, after being freed Daley changed his name, moved to a different part of the country, and tried to disappear. However, finding missing people is part of the detective game. I didn't have much trouble locating him."

"What was the name of the reporter?"

"David Childs."

The IABI lieutenant came to his feet, went over to the desk, sat down before the TV-phone screen and dialed.

When the screen lit up, with an inquiring face there, he said, "Lieutenant Petersen of the Inter-American Bureau of Investigation. Do you have a reporter on your staff named David Childs?"

"Just a moment, Lieutenant." And then, shortly, "No, we have no employee on the *Times-Tribune* of that name."

"Might you have had three months ago?"

"No, Lieutenant. We've never had a David Childs."

Petersen flicked off the phone and returned to the comfort chair. He

said to Rex. "Some detective. Didn't you bother to check on this Childs guy? Find out if he was really a newspaperman?"

Rex shook his head in self-deprecation. "It never occurred to me."

"We have witnesses who identified you when you turned up in the town where he had moved and made inquiries in his neighborhood. You evidently flashed your license around in a bar and in a couple of stores."

"Of course. Why not? I had nothing to hide. I was simply trying to locate a missing person. I didn't know this Childs was a phoney."

Petersen said, "We know you didn't do it. I've already checked you out. You didn't leave town yesterday. And you were right here in your apartment at the time Daley was chilled. But how do we know you weren't really in cahoots with Childs?"

"I don't know. How could I prove it?"

"How did you get in touch with Childs to report when you'd located the good lieutenant?"

"He gave me a number to phone."

"What did he look like?"

"I never saw him. He said the screen on his phone was on the blink."

The lieutenant laughed bitterly. "How did you collect your fee?"

"I didn't. The bastard promised to transfer the amount involved to my credit account and never did."

Petersen sighed. "When did you last have another missing-person assignment?"

"About a year ago."

"Don't tell me. Let me guess. You got that job over the phone as well and, surprise, surprise, on that occasion too the screen was out of repair. The job was to locate Bo Teeter. Bo Teeter, who was found not guilty of shooting a civil rights worker named Ann Bethel and a black companion who was a civil rights activist. They were driving in the same car together, a white woman and a nigger, and that was too much for Bo."

Rex was eyeing him in frustration.

The lieutenant said, "And shortly after you found dear Bo, who was as guilty as sin, he disappeared. On the exact day of the twentieth anniversary of his trial. Why were you locating Bo Teeter?"

"It was for a lawyer who said he had a legacy to hand over to Robert Teeter I didn't know anything about Teeter's case at the time I was only a kid when he shot those two civil rights people There was precious little difficulty finding him He hadn't bothered to change his name."

"And I suppose you didn't get paid for that job either."

Rex closed his eyes in pain "That's right "

"Now, what I want to know is, this lawyer and David Childs, could it have been the same voice?"

"I suppose so There were nine months in between and the voice could have been disguised on either or both occasions "

The lieutenant said wearily, "Do you remember the bombing of that Central American politician in Miami about a year and a half ago? Rudolfo Sanchez."

"Vaguely. Wasn't he the former president of one of those banana republics and escaped with about fifty million dollars after having his National Guard kill thousands of the guerrillas who were trying to overthrow his regime?"

"That's him And the bomb got to him on the twentieth anniversary of his flight from his capital city, after ripping off the whole treasury "

Rex put it all together "Each of these was exactly twenty years following the crime?"

"That's right, Bader Now you're brightening up And they are not alone Have you ever heard of Herr Doktor Otto Helm? Probably not He did his thing before your day Some of the newspapers dubbed him 'The Last of the Nazis ' He was one of the really bad ones Medical experiments on imprisoned Jews and Gypsies Kind of blood-curdling He hid out in the Argentine but after years had passed returned to Germany in disguise to locate some of the loot he had buried in the final months of Hitler's regime He was caught and brought to trial There was some hanky-panky at his trial and he was released He then evidently retrieved his money and retired to Switzerland About two years ago came the twentieth anniversary of his trial He was poisoned to death in his chalet near Lucerne It wasn't a very nice poison and it wasn't quick-acting."

"What's it all about?" Rex said, mystified

"Evidently, a crackpot A do-gooder who can't stand the idea of

these king-sized bastards getting away with it He waits a full twenty years By that time, your Lieutenant Daleys, your President Sanchezes, your Bo Teeters are feeling secure They change identities they move to foreign countries, or whatever At any rate, they think they've beaten the rap Then comes our hero and lowers the boom The trouble is, it's against the law He takes the law into his own hands, like Superman, Mike Hammer and Travis McGee in the old stories So he's got to be stopped "

"Where do I come in on all this? You seem to be building up to something Obviously, I'm sorry about my role, but there's nothing I can do about it now."

The lieutenant came to his feet "Possibly there is If anybody contacts you again about missing persons, especially with a supposedly broken screen on his phone, get in touch with me soonest Meanwhile, do you have those phone numbers that Childs and the lawyer gave you to contact them with?"

Rex shook his head "In both cases I phoned them back when my pay didn't materialize In both cases the phones had been disconnected So I tossed the numbers away in disgust "

The lieutenant said, "Okay Bader The matter of revoking your license is still being considered I'm assigned to this on a full-time basis and I'll try to put in a plug for you Meanwhile, here's my card Call me at my home if you remember anything at all that might be useful, or, of course if anybody else wants to check a missing person "

He handed over the card and left

In the morning, Rex Bader went into his bath, applied depilatory shaving cream and wiped his beard away with a face towel Even as he went through the rest of his morning routine, he thought about it

Damn it He was going to have to do something about Petersen and the threat to revoke his license Theoretically, it didn't mean as much as all that to him The IABI man had been right Rex would be just as well off on Negative Income Tax as he was as a practicing detective However, it was the principle of the thing Childs and Burroughs, the lawyer, had made a patsy of him And they were probably the same person He'd been put in a position where he was an accessory in two

assassinations At least, it was to be assumed that Bo Teeter was as dead as Lieutenant Daley.

He finished dressing, went into his dining nook, sat down at the table and dialed breakfast from the auto-restaurant located in the bowels of the building several floors below him

The trouble was, he had nothing to go on This guy Petersen was seemingly assigned to the case on a full-time basis Who knew how many men he had under him, not to speak of all the resources of the IABI? If Petersen couldn't crack the case, why should Rex Bader be able to?

Well, Rex Bader probably couldn't, but he had nothing else to do but try Clients weren't exactly pounding on his door

One thing came to him Petersen had named four victims of the after-twenty-years assassin But perhaps there were more? More than the IABI man had told him about, or more even than Petersen knew of? And why assume that there was only one man involved in the deaths? Could it be an organization rather than an individual and an international organization at that? If so, who could say how many of these twenty-years-after killings had taken place?

There was a metro stop right in the huge *Times-Tribune* building He took an elevator directly from the station to the floor he wanted Having been here on various occasions before, he headed directly for the Morgue.

The Morgue, like practically everything else these days, was fully automated As a licensed private investigator, he was granted permission to have access to the archives Inside, he found an empty office and made himself comfortable before the screen on the desk

He started off by dialing the file on Bo Teeter, Georgia redneck and Ku Klux Klansman He wasn't ignorant of the basic facts of the case When the news reports came through about the disappearance of the killer of the two civil rights workers, he had read them, in view of the fact that James Burroughs, supposed lawyer, had recently hired him to locate Bo His first reaction had been that the man had simply disappeared on purpose But that didn't tie in with the fact that he had left all his few possessions behind Teeter had been on NIT and couldn't have afforded to leave his things

He found nothing in the Teeter file that clued him in and dialed that of Lieutenant William Daley. He came up with a blank there too. There was nothing in the file of the mass killer of Vietnamese civilians that gave Rex any idea of where to go next.

Just for luck, he also dialed the files on President Sanchez and Doktor Otto Helm. Blank. There certainly seemed to be no connection between the four victims. The only thing they had in common was that they all had been killers themselves, though all in different categories. Indeed, the president had possibly never killed anyone personally, only ordered others to do it, including his sadistic police.

Rex leaned back for a moment, frustrated. He was getting nowhere.

Something came to him. An adage in police work was that when someone took onto himself an alias he almost always chose a new name that had some connection with his past. A man named John Smith would very likely choose one such as James Shyler, so that the initials on his luggage and such would remain the same. Or often a fugitive would change his last name, at least to that of someone he knew.

Just for luck, he dialed the name Childs and spent the next hour skim-reading all news items dealing with people with that appellation. No result. He did the same with Burroughs and was appalled by the number of Burroughs who had been newsworthy. But there was no final result.

He slumped back in his chair. It was getting on to lunch. He wondered bitterly why he had come here. What he had really expected to find.

And then the obvious fact hit him.

The killer — or killers — made the attack after twenty years had elapsed to the day. He — or they — had struck at least four times in the comparatively recent past. Only the day before yesterday, in the case of Daley. It was to be assumed that new victims were a possibility.

He dialed a summary of the news of twenty years ago.

The summary gave him the top twenty-five stories of the year. Nothing clicked. There seemed to have been nothing that year, internationally, that might have sparked the killer. He dialed a wider summary: the fifty top stories of the year, twenty years ago. He still didn't get anywhere.

And then something came to him Three of the four assassinations had happened here in the States, only one abroad At least, so far as he knew He dialed the fifty outstanding stories of the United States, not of the world

And, yes, there was the trial of Lieutenant Daley and that of Robert "Bo" Teeter And another item, too He had been too young at the time to be particularly interested, but he vaguely remembered the story.

The last of the Mafia gang wars The last and the harshest Literally dozens of the soldiers, button men, *capo-regimes, consiglori*, and even a *capo di tutti capi* went down to the pistol, the shotgun, the submachine gun, the bomb and to the traditional Sicilian strangler's wire The gang wars of Capone and Lucky Luciano were as nothing to this A *capo di tutti capi* was emerging who, once and for all, was going to eliminate all rivals And he did Natale Gambino, though only some forty years of age, survived as the only godfather remaining of the Mafia, La Cosa Nostra, the Syndicate, call it what you will

The half-hearted prosecution on the part of the police and the other arms of the State proved meaningless Too many politicians were in the pocket of Natale "Natty" Gambino, whose greatest pride was the fact that he had once been nominated for the Ten Best-Dressed Men of the Year Such as the President of the United States, Prince Charles and various movie and TV stars beat him out, but at least he was nominated

Rex Bader closed his eyes in thought When Gambino had arisen from the shambles of what had once been called the "families" it had been a war that extended not only to New York and nearby New Jersey and Philadelphia, and not only to all North America, but to the world Even Sicily, the home of the formerly loosely-tied organization, was under his thumb.

Scores of men killed If the truth be known, it must have finally been hundreds It was a *world war* in criminal ranks, not one of the skirmishes of the past.

And what had happened to Natty Gambino in the twenty years that had elapsed since armistice had been declared in La Cosa Nostra? Nothing He simply disappeared from public sight And, offhand, Rex Bader couldn't think of anything about him in the news for years He

didn't even know if the man was still alive, though he must be Had he died, surely that would have gotten into the news

And what had happened to the ultra-Mafia he had built? That too had slipped from the news Rex hadn't even heard the term Mafia for possibly a decade

But aside from Daley and Bo Teeter he couldn't think of a single person more likely to have attracted the attention of the twenty-years-after assassin than Natty Gambino, wherever he might be these days

Rex Bader was frisked for weapons three times before he finally got in to see the big fellow Once at the huge iron gate of the palatial Catskill Mountains estate once at the front door and once at the office On all three occasions there were three of them Cold-eyed, neatly dressed, burly young men who obviously knew their jobs On all three occasions while one did the searching the others stood back very alert They didn't find anything Rex hadn't been silly enough to bring along even a pocket knife

In his early sixties, Natale Gambino still lived up to his nickname Natty was being fitted by a tailor and two assistants when Rex was ushered in by one of the guards at the door The tailor, all in correct tradition, had several pins in his mouth, a tape measure in hand

Gambino gave Rex a quick stare from foot to head and said, "Sit down Be with you in a minute "

Rex found a chair near the desk and sat down and crossed his legs The guard leaned with his back against the wall next to the door, his eyes never leaving the visitor.

The tailor took only a few more minutes and then left after the two effeminate assistants had gathered up all their things

Natty Gambino, who in truth actually looked somewhat like Al Capone in his later years, sans scar along the cheek, took the chair behind the desk and said, "It's been so long since I've seen a shamus I can't remember."

Rex winced inwardly at the term but said nothing

The Mafia head said, "I wouldn't be seeing you now except for that phone call from my cousin Sophia I owe Sophia What've you got on Sophia, she should make the call?"

"I did a small job for her once," Rex told him

Gambino grunted "Some kind of job her own boys couldn't handle? You don't look that tough, uh "

"Bader, Rex Bader."

"Okay, Bader I can give you maybe five minutes You want a drink?"

"Thanks A Scotch and water would go fine "

"Salvatore, get Bader a Scotch Wine for me, the usual "

For the first time, the guard took his eyes from Rex and went to the large, old-fashioned bar at the end of the enormous office Rex hadn't seen anything but auto-bars for years It would seem such modern gizmos weren't for Natale Gambino

Salvatore brought the drinks back on a heavy silver tray, allowed Rex to take up his Scotch and then put the tray next to his boss on the desk It held a bottle of champagne and a champagne glass. Gambino poured for himself

"Okay," the Mafia head said "What'd'ya want, Bader?"

"I wanted to warn you."

The guard had resumed his position next to the door, his eyes again on the visitor Now his eyebrows went up slightly

His chief's own eyes had narrowed

"Warn me? What's that supposed to mean, wise guy?"

"I've got reason to believe that somebody's out to get you "

The older man grunted a laugh "Is that supposed to be news? I know maybe a hundred guys wouldn't mind seeing me dead But they know better'n to try."

"This one's a bit different "

"All right Tell me about this different one " He looked over at the guard "We ain't seen much very different for a long time, eh, Salvatore?"

The guard smiled politely.

Rex said, "I don't suppose you've heard about the twenty-years-after man."

Gambino scowled at him "I don't know what the hell you're talking about."

So Rex told him, in detail, of Lieutenant Daley, of Bo Teeter, of President Sanchez and the Herr Doktor Helm He mentioned that he suspected that others had possibly already been eliminated and that still others might be on the list

When he was through the other was glaring at him. "What the hell's all that crap got to do with me?"

"It was twenty years ago, give or take a day or two, that you eliminated most of your colleagues, Mr. Gambino."

The other finished off his glass of bubbly wine, poured another, put his head back and roared laughter.

"That's one hell of a way to put it, hey Salvatore?" Natty Gambino called over.

Rex said evenly, "Do you deny it?"

"Deny it! Hell no, I don't deny it. It was business. It had to be done. Hell, I did in four of them myself with a baseball bat."

Rex Bader looked at him.

Gambino pushed his glass to one side and leaned on the desk top, glaring again at his visitor.

"They were in the way, see? Left over from the old days. They were in stuff like numbers. Peanuts. Stuff like loan sharking. Stuff like dope. Stuff like whores. Stuff like labor unions. Small-time shakedown rackets. Peanuts. All that stuff was on its way out. It was time to go legit. Anybody smart enough could see we had to start sending our kids to college, making like ladies and gentlemen out of them. We had to get into the big time, resorts, restaurant chains, night club chains, big swanky casinos where they're legit like Vegas, Atlantic City, the Bahamas, into real estate, even banking. They couldn't see it. They drug their feet. From time to time they'd have half-assed shoot-outs, knocking each other off. Well, I showed them what a real shoot-out was. I had whole families wiped out. Those that wouldn't go along with me. Let the niggers take over the numbers, let the greasers take over dope. The hell with that penny-ante stuff. Natty Gambino's big time." He gestured at the bottle of vintage champagne. "Nothing but the best for Natty."

Rex said. "All right. That's what I'm telling you. Twenty years have gone by since you ordered the bumping off of all those Cosa Nostra family people. And this twenty years after crackpot possibly has you on his list."

Gambino poured more wine, in disgust. "For crissakes, Bader. So I'm on his list. So what? These four guys you mentioned. Each one of them was living quiet. Two of them poor guys. All of them unsuspecting like. They thought the heat was off. They relaxed. And

the crazy got to them But I'm not relaxed, I'm not unsuspecting Experts have tried to hit Natty Gambino, Bader You know how many boys I got guarding this joint? You know what kinda equipment they got? It'd take a regiment of Marines to root me out of here, Bader Not some crazy."

"He's had awfully good luck, so far."

"He'll need a damn sight more before he ever gets next to Natty Gambino What the hell'd you come here for? Trying to shake me down with a stupid story like this?"

Rex sighed "As you know, I'm a private investigator I thought possibly you might pay me a small fee for my efforts Besides, if I was in on catching him, the publicity wouldn't do me any harm."

"Well, think again, shamus I never did like flatfeet and I still don't Throw the crumb out, Salvatore No, wait a minute Just see him out I owe Cousin Sophia."

Rex was at his desk perusing the Interpol reports when his identity screen buzzed He intuitively knew who it must be And he was right The unsmiling face of Lieutenant Warren Petersen greeted him

He opened up and led the way back to comfort chair and couch As before, he sat on the couch.

Petersen came immediately to the point "It's occurred to me that if you do a little chore for the Bureau, it might rescue your license, Bader."

Rex nodded. "What little chore?"

"I've been checking back on other bad guys who might have pulled something and got away with it, twenty years ago Somebody who might have become of interest to our twenty-years-after assassin."

"That makes sense," Rex told him "What did you find?"

"About twenty years ago a Mafia godfather, Natale Gambino started up the gang war to end all gang wars In fact, it did When he emerged victorious, his opponents were all dead, so were many of their women and children whom he didn't want around looking for vengeance in after years He seemingly disappeared and for all practical purposes nothing has been heard from him since."

"And you want me to find him?"

"That's right."

Rex let air out of his lungs "Look Petersen, you represent the

Inter-American Bureau of Investigation Why can't the IABI find him? Why turn to a third-rate private investigator?"

"Don't be silly, Bader If we started prying around the assassin would become suspicious and wouldn't show But you, with no official position, could question about the way you did with Daley and Bo"

Rex shook his head "That's a poor excuse, Petersen, or whatever your name is Obviously, the IABI has methods of prying around a damn sight more sophisticated than any I could come up with And as far as Natty Gambino is concerned, I'm sure the IABI has known all along where he keeps himself In one heli of a big estate up in the Catskills, about a mile up the Overlook Mountain from Woodstock, the art colony He's gone legit, as he calls it He probably hasn't done anything the IABI could get after him for in nearly twenty years"

Petersen said dangerously, "What do you mean, 'or whatever your name is'?"

"I mean that I took a lesson from your first visit When I told you that a reporter named David Childs had hired me, you immediately phoned the *Times-Tribune* and asked if they had an employee by that name They didn't, and you rubbed my nose in the fact Okay This morning I called a friend in the IABI and asked if they had a lieutenant named Warren Petersen They didn't"

Rex Bader dropped a hand beneath the cushion beside him and came up with a 9mm Noiseless He pointed it at the other

And the other stiffened

Rex said, "As a layman, you didn't have any trouble locating President Sanchez in Miami, nor Doktor Helm in Switzerland, they were both out in the open But Lieutenant Daley and Bo Teeter were something else You didn't have the know-how to find them So, over the phone, you hired a third-rate detective to do the job He did But you couldn't pull the broken-TV-phone-screen gag a third time So you came to me directly It isn't as difficult to get forged papers as all that And a phoney IABI badge and identity card aren't as complicated as all that You probably bought them in Switzerland, the good old espionage-counterespionage center, where forgers abound, while you were over there poisoning the Herr Doktor So now you've made your third attempt You wanted me to locate Natty Gambino

All right. I've already done it He's leading a sedentary life in the Catskills, conducting his now 'legit' business from there "

He who had called himself Petersen looked at him "What are you going to do?"

"What's it all about, uh, Petersen? At first I thought it might be a whole organization of international screwballs, but now I suspect that you're the whole thing."

The other slumped down in the chair, suddenly ten years older in appearance

He said, "You probably don't know of the story It was a long time ago when I was in my early teens Our family was upper-middle-class, fairly well-to-do, the father a surgeon Mother, father, four children The house paid for, the cars paid for, money in the bank, lots of insurance And then, out of a clear sky, one night a drug-crazed psycho broke in You've read of similar accounts It happens all the time.. as they say My parents were killed, my eight-year-old sister was killed after being raped My two younger brothers were killed after being sodomized I too was left for dead "

Rex closed his eyes in pain.

The other pushed on "The drug-crazed destroyer of our home and family was caught He had a record of various sexual assaults and was even suspected of other homicides However, his father was one of the most influential men in the state He was committed to a fancy institution and remained there for a few years When everything had cooled off, in that few years, he was declared cured and released "

There were beads of cold sweat on his forehead and for a moment he paused.

"And?" Rex prompted.

"I was waiting for him I knew he'd be released The family savings, and particularly my father's insurance money, were now in my possession I was not without resources but I was without mercy. However, before I could get to him he died as a result of an overdose of heroin He died peacefully and calmly in his own home, his tolerant, loving family about him, without ever knowing that it was happening "

Rex nodded "What has this got to do with Teeter and Daley and

the others? By the way, were there others besides them and Sanchez and Helm?"

"No. Natty Gambino was to be the next. I planned to continue until I was killed myself or caught by the police."

The tortured man leaned forward as though pleading. "Bader, have you ever considered the number of persons who have suffered and died at the whim of a psychopathic killer? Look at Hitler. I am not referring only to the six-million-plus Jews, Gypsies, Poles and Russians that he had gassed and otherwise executed. But it has been estimated that some forty million persons in all died as a result of his efforts. Even his simple-minded mistress-cum-bride, Eva Braun, who really need not have died with him, there at the end. The conquering allies would not have harmed her. She was a nonentity. Consider Stalin. In his suppression of the peasants in the Ukraine it has been estimated that ten million died before he was able to impose his collectives. In the Orient, how many died under Chiang Kai-shek and, later, Mao? In the United States how many Indians were butchered by such men as Custer? At least he got what was coming to him. Stalin, Mao and Chiang Kai-shek died peacefully in bed in the fullness of their years. This has too often been the history of the worst humanity has produced. The Alexanders, the Napoleons, the Genghis Khans and Tamerlanes, all died peacefully in bed."

Rex sighed and said, "So you decided to cut down the percentage of those who die peacefully in bed."

"Yes. I told you when we first talked that the twenty-years-after assassin was a crackpot. I know it. I am a crackpot. I devoted my life to revenging those who have died at the hands of such people as Bo Teeter and Lieutenant Daley."

Rex Bader looked at him for a long moment. Finally, he put his gun down on the couch next to him.

Petersen stared. "What are you going to do?"

"Nothing," Rex said reasonably. "I have no client. I'm not involved."

The other's eyes were bugging now. "You mean I can go?"

"Why not? There's the door."

The other stood. Shook his head. Shakily started to say something, then closed his mouth. He managed his way to the door and left.

When the man was gone Rex said aloud, though softly, "I wish you luck, Petersen, but I doubt if you'll ever get through those bodyguards Whether or not you do, whether he kills you or you kill him, justice, such as it is, is served either way If I'd turned you in, you would have wound up the rest of your life in a pressure cooker, a funny farm. And I wouldn't wish that on an an idealist "

The Faust theme in fantasy is a challenge to every writer in the field. It's something like the science fiction writer who, before he can claim to be an old pro, must come up with a new departure on the time-travel bit. Or the mystery story writer who must have a new departure on a murdered victim in a completely sealed room (Edgar Allan Poe was the first to do this one). Following in the path of the late and lamented John Collier, my 'selling your soul to the devil' yarn is humorous.

Give the Devil His Due

"WHY YOU LOOK EXACTLY as I imagined you would," exclaimed Nostradamus Perkins, student of the occult.

"You've got a vivid imagination, is all I can say," the demon told him bitterly, looking down at his cloven hoof, back at his barbed tail, and gingerly feeling the horns on his head. "What in hell did you think I'd look like if not the way you imagined me?"

"Why, I— I don't believe I get your point," Nostradamus Perkins said.

"Skip it, then," the demon told him, still fingering the horns as though fascinated with them.

"Not at all," the student of forbidden mysteries snapped, careful not to step out of the pentacle he'd drawn with colored chalk on his living room rug. "I have you in my power and expect to extract from you whatever knowledge I desire."

The demon looked at him questioningly. "You've got me where?

Say, what space-time continuum is this anyway? I've had some strange specimens call me up in my day, but this really tears it!"

Nostradamus Perkins said hesitatingly "You mean you don't know where you are?"

The demon was trying out the tail wagging it sharply from left to right, back again "Of course not," he said reasonably "Why should I know where I am? *You're* the one who did the materializing "

"Well," the student snapped, "you're the devil, at least I suppose you know where you *came* from."

The other eyed him in puzzlement "You're quite devilish yourself " he said "Now what's all this about anyway, and what was the purpose in going to all the rigmarole involved in dragging me up here? Not that I don't appreciate the business, of course "

Nostradamus shook his head firmly "That won't do I know better, Satan."

"The name is Ozidaminos " the other said mildly

"As I said," Perkins insisted in what he hoped was a commanding voice actually this whole matter wasn't going the way he'd planned at all, for one thing the demon was so damnably *amiable* "As I said, you are now in my power and must do as I command "

The demon stopped playing with his tail and scratched the end of his nose with a claw-tipped finger "I continually get the impression that I came into this conversation late " he murmured "Now, let's start at the beginning Just what have you got in mind that I can't refuse doing?"

"I want to sell my soul," Perkins told him

"Your what?"

"My soul," the other repeated, his voice beginning to reflect some of the puzzlement that had been in the demon's for the past five minutes

Ozidaminos, for the first time, took in his surroundings He noted the pentacle in which the other was standing, the bizarre-looking brazier smoking to his right, the skull sitting on the table beside the old and tattered manuscripts, the charts of the zodiac on the walls, he sniffed the incense.

"I'm beginning to recall this set-up," he said thoughtfully "It's been a long time, but it seems to me that the last one to give me this song and dance was wearing a funny-looking cloak embroidered with stars and moons " He paused a moment in thought "As I remember, he

wanted to sell me his soul too, in exchange for the knowledge of how to change lead to gold."

"Did you tell him?" Perkins asked, breathlessly

"Sure," the demon said, "but I doubt if it did him any good, he didn't have either the equipment, the materials, or the manpower to build the plant. I gave him the specifications, for all I know, he's poring over them still Frankly, I've often thought since that he was a bit around the corner What would be accomplished by changing lead to gold? The amount of work involved is considerably more than if you dug the gold in the first place "

Nostradamus Perkins was impatient of the trend of the conversation. "I don't believe you," he said, "and, besides, we're getting away from the point The point is that I have you in my power and have a contract I wish to make with you,"

The demon complained, "You keep bringing up this, 'I have you in my power stuff ' Would you mind explaining?"

Nostradamus glared at him "Do not think to throw me off, vile demon," he said sonorously "I knowest full well thou must needs "

"Listen," Ozidaminos protested, "stick to one dialect, will you? Do you think it's fun having to pick a mind for a whole language and then have the guy switch on you? What's this *knowest* and *thou* stuff?"

"Don't interrupt," Nostradamus Perkins barked "I have summoned you and have certain powers "

"You sound more like that customer with the stars and moons robe every minute," the demon told him, returning to fascinated experimentation with the tail He was trying to wag it in circles now

"Will you stop playing with that confounded thing," the student of the occult screamed

The demon eyed him reproachfully "It wasn't my idea, you know " he said mildly "I never had one before Suppose somebody suddenly tied one of these things on you Wouldn't you have the curiosity to investigate a bit?"

Perkins looked as though he was about to prance around the room in his agitation, but restrained himself before crossing the chalk line of the pentacle He shrilled his protest "Here I spend years, *years*, in learning how to summon a devil, and what do I get?"

"You got me," the demon said "What did you have in mind?"

"I had *you* in mind," Perkins shrilled desperately "I wanted to sell

my soul, but I'm beginning to wonder whether or not you could make the agreement I wanted."

"This soul stuff escapes me," Oziadamnos said soothingly "but I'll be glad to give you what you want" He added with caution, "If possible."

The other took a deep breath and a sly look entered his eyes "Very well," he said "Do you have a contract?"

"A what?" the demon asked stamping his cloven hoof on the floor, interested in the clattering sound it made

"Good heavens, don't do that," Perkins told him hurriedly "Do you want to break my lease?"

The demon said mildly, "You certainly are difficult to get along with I was just experimenting with this fantastic foot you gave me What's a contract?"

"What do you mean, *I gave you*? And you know full well what a contract is; I sign it with blood."

The demon stared at him wide-eyed "You must be jesting" he said Then, "No, now that I recall, the guy with the moons and stars on his cloak had the same idea"

"Will you please stop talking about this man with the moons and stars!" Perkins shrilled

"Sorry" the demon said appeasingly "Where were we?"

"The contract!"

"Oh yes, the contract Tell me more about it, and don't get so excited. You'll get ulcers."

Perkins began to prance again "I am willing to sell my soul in return for one wish!" he yelled in agitation

"All right," the demon said, in a tone that suggested he was humoring the other "What do you want?"

"The contract," the other suggested slyly "I want to sign the contract first"

"Listen," the demon told him, "I haven't the vaguest idea of what you mean You summoned me, showing you believed in me, very well, I'm grateful, now tell me what you want and it's yours"

"In return for my immortal soul," the other said dramatically

"If that's the way you want it," the demon said, shrugging

"Done!" said Nostradamus Perkins quickly, as though in fear the

demon might change his mind "And here is my wish *I demand immortality*." He began to laugh, almost hysterically.

"Okay," Ozidaminos said, "immortality it is What's so funny?"

The other took a long moment to get over his fit of laughter "Don't you see?" he cried "I've beaten you"

The demon rubbed the end of his nose with the claw-tipped finger He said ruefully, "This is a hell of a way to make a living What's happened now?"

Perkins shrilled in glee "Don't you see Don't you *see*! I've beaten you You've given me immortality, now you can never collect my soul."

"Your code of ethics is lousy," said the demon "Luckily, it doesn't affect me But, frankly, and from the friendliest of motives, I'd suggest you change your mind about that immortality stuff I can give it to you all right, and since I've given my word, will, if you want But are you sure?"

The other laughed long and loud Until, as a matter of fact, somebody started pounding on the apartment wall with a shoe "Do not think to confound me, Satan Thou knowest full well that thou canst not forswear thy pledge "

"There you go with that screwy dialect again," Ozidaminos complained "You sound as if you have been reading corny books or something."

"Your agreement must be lived up to," Perkins finished

The demon shrugged again "It's all right with me You're asking for it, but you might pick out something a bit less hard on yourself After all, I'm here to give you a hand"

The other stopped laughing and bent a prejudiced eye on him "You're here to rob me of my soul," Perkins rasped "But you'll never have it; I've beaten you."

Ozidaminos shook his head at him in bewilderment "This soul you keep talking about Just what is it?"

Nostradamus Perkins gaped and started to say, "But, that is why you came ," then he broke off, a hint of suspicion in his voice "But, why *did* you come," he asked, "if it wasn't for my soul?"

The demon shrugged smugly "I came because you summoned me And, to be frank, I needed it pretty badly There has been so much

doubt in this world of our existence that we of the other world are badly beset Old Ishtar and Aeshma Daeva, for instance, have practically faded away, and Zeus and his gang you'd hate to see them, knowing the weight they used to throw "

"I . . . I don't understand."

The demon yawned "Oh, surely you must, otherwise you wouldn't have known how to summon me for a favor Surely it is elemental that everything is in the mind Matter exists, life exists, everything exists, but in the human mind We of the other world are dependent entirely upon your beliefs in us You summoned me Good I am grateful I am willing to exercise certain powers I possess and which you lack to give you your desire In return, I know I am secure, for as long as you live, *you* will believe."

"As a matter of fact," he added with satisfaction, "now that you have immortality, I am guaranteed at least one believer for the rest of eternity."

He took to contemplating his tail again, a shade of revulsion on his face "You should have seen how the Greeks used to dream me up," he said wistfully "I was really something worth seeing, you know, golden armor and everything "

Nostradamus Perkins said in bewilderment, "Ishtar? Greeks? Believers?" He scowled, certain doubts beginning to run through him "Are are the inhabitants of your 'world', as you call it, Gods or Devils?"

"What's the difference?" Ozidaminos asked disinterestedly "One man's God is another's Devil it's all in the viewpoint Actually, we're all about the same Of course, you humans make up a whole new set of rules and regulations every few hundred years, and there's a lot of, er propaganda thrown around, but, substantially, we're all about the same."

"But my soul?" Perkins protested

"Never heard of it," said the other His head jerked suddenly "You'll have to pardon me," he said "I just got a call " He hesitated, seemingly distressed "Sorry about that immortality business," he added "However, you asked for it and it's yours Frankly, I don't think you'll enjoy it, especially after the first million years or so I doubt if there'll be any members of the human race left by

then except you, of course. But, anyway, thanks again for calling me up."

He disappeared suddenly.

For a long time Nostradamus Perkins sat and pondered the desirability of immortality. His eyes slowly widened as some of the ramifications came home to him He didn't go mad, although that might have been preferable in the long run

Possibly my best known series was the Section G United Planets yarns They were written back in the fifties and sixties in the days when I was still stooping to space opera, to which I am currently allergic Most of them were novel or novella lengths which appeared in Analog *as serials and later went into paperbacks In fact, off hand, this is the only short in the series that I can remember*

Psi Assassin

SUPERVISOR LEE CHANG CHI said, "But Sid, are you sure? I have never approved of personal assassination "

Sidney Jakes, of Section G, Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, Commissariat of Interplanetary Affairs, of United Planets, was less than his exuberant self His face was as unhappy as his colleague's "There's no alternative, Lee Chang This is the third troupe we've had swallowed up in the maw of El Primero's goonies He's built a police state unknown since Adolf the Aryan's under Himmler We've got to get rid of him "

She was less than convinced "Why the immediacy? Suppose it came out? The reputation of Section G is already so low that if something like this...."

Sid Jakes was making negative motions with a forefinger to interrupt her "That's the point This Michael Ortega, El Primero of the planet Doria, has our number and is using it in an attempt to club us over the head Commissioner Metaxa made a big mistake when he

revealed to so many chiefs of state the true nature of United Planets That the basic *raison d'ëtre* of our organization is to push scientific, industrial and socio-economic progress, no matter what institutions might stand in the way Too many were allowed into the secret Some, evidently, leaked it."

The diminutive Chinese woman — more a girl, in physical appearance – shifted her slight, cheongsam-clad figure in her chair "But what is he doing?"

Sid Jakes grunted disgust. "Seemingly not much. He invokes Article One of the United Planets *The United Planets organization shall take no steps to interfere with the internal political, socio-economic or religious institutions of its member planets* And he threatens, if we persist in opposing his policies, to pull out of the UP and, further, to reveal to the total membership of the confederation the fact that Section G, in particular, has been subverting the institutions of the more backward worlds."

"I'm not up on Doria. What are the particular institutions blocking progress there?"

"A personal dictatorship interested in maintaining the status quo at any price."

Lee Chang said, in protest, "We have many tyrannies in the UP Religious hierarchies, industrial feudalism, matriarchies, patriarchies and so on...."

Sid Jakes was waggling his finger at her again "Not like this He's comparable to Russia's Stalin, to the Dominican Republic's Trujillo, back in the Twentieth Century "

A frown on Lee Chang's face was a gentle thing. She said, "I've heard of Stalin, of course."

"Trujillo Rafael Trujillo," Sid Jakes said impatiently "Trained by the U S Marines in the days when, at the drop of a sombrero, the marines landed in any Latin American country that didn't toe the United States mark Back in the 1920's when the marines were making the world safe for those who had them " He snorted amusement, the usual Sid Jakes showing face for a moment "With American backing, he seized power in 1930 and held onto it until he was shot in 1961. During those thirty years he ruled absolutely for himself, his family and a small circle of associates He milked his little country dry.

Finally, even the American elements that had originally supported him got fed up But he lasted more than a generation, Lee Chang We can't afford to have Ortega do the same "

Lee Chang Chu looked unhappily and unseeingly about the Octagon office in which they sat She said, at last, "But assassination My experience has been that it seldom accomplishes the desired result Take the Grand Duke Ferdinand The South Slavonian patriots who shot him there on the streets of Sarajevo hardly expected his death to precipitate the First World War Take Philip of Macedon, an extremely capable organizer, cut down in his capital The result? Alexander, his son, evidently a god in physical appearance but no great brain, rampaged through the civilized world with Philip's army butchering millions in building his empire And what happened to it on his drunken death? It fell apart, and for generations his generals and their sons, and their sons, fought it out, destroying Greece and the Near East to the point that the stolid Romans were able to take over "

"Two examples," Sid Jakes grimaced

Lee Chang said softly, "The most famous lynching of all time didn't accomplish that which was desired That is the silencing of the teachings of the Rebel."

Sid Jakes looked at her in speculation His own voice was impatient "Are you so sure? I assume you refer to the troubles in Jerusalem True enough His name went on, but did His teachings? Assuming He had original teachings which has been debated "

Lee Chang frowned "The Sermon on the Mount went on even though He died."

"There is nothing original in that sermon It is all to be found in the writings of the latter prophets in the Old Testament I was referring to original teachings If He had any, they were soon forgotten, or" he twisted his mouth cynically "deliberately suppressed by those who called themselves followers, but who had their own axes to grind "

"But...the Golden Rule."

"Ye Gods, you babe in the woods," Jakes snorted "The Golden Rule hardly originated with Joshua of Nazareth There hasn't been a religion, a holy man or even a philosopher who hasn't stated that bit of truth, down through the ages " He turned grimly serious

"Enough of this arguing Lee Chang El Primero must go We can't

allow him to hang on for a generation or two Doria is crucial in the economic development of United Planets We can't have this ruling hierarchy, headed by Ortega continue to drag their heels We need an assassin You say we have one in this Special Talents group of yours?"

"Yes, we have one," Lee Chang Chu said softly She came to her feet, preparatory to leaving

Sid said, "Send him in We've lost too many good operatives on Doria El Primero has got to go"

She hesitated before turning to leave "Any word from Ronald?"

Again his face was empty "No We haven't been able to raise him Ronny Bronston, or any of his troupe We can only assume the secret police got to him, Lee Chang."

Her words were barely audible "I'll send Sam in, Supervisor Jakes"

"Sam?"

"The assassin you wanted"

At the knock on his partly ajar door Sid Jakes called, "Come in, come in! It's open It's always open!" He looked up expectantly

And frowned

The little man said, hesitantly, "Supervisor Jakes?"

Sid Jakes said, "Ah, come in Take a chair Excuse me for a minute."

While the colorless newcomer found himself a seat and settled down, hands folded in lap, Sid Jakes flicked on his orderbox

"Irene," he complained "Didn't I tell you I was expecting a top priority—"

The box squawked and Sid Jakes flinched He grinned "All right, all right, I love you too But the thing is, I'm sure this" he looked over at the newcomer "ah, gentleman, has something very important If he got past *you*, it must be something important However, I'm momentarily expecting one of Lee Chang's new Special Talents agents and..."

The orderbox squawked.

Sid Jakes did a double take

He switched off the interoffice communicator and said accusingly, "You're Sam?"

The other flushed with embarrassment and nodded

Sid Jakes closed his eyes for a long moment His face worked slightly He shook his head Finally, it was as though something new had occurred to him He opened his eyes again, hopefully

He said, "Cosmetics and Wardrobe have certainly done a fine job on you, ah, Citizen..."

"Goodboy," the other squeaked He cleared his throat apologetically

"I beg your pardon?" Sid Jakes said

"Goodboy," the other said "Samuel Goodboy "

"Oh," Sid Jakes said, forcing heartiness into his voice "Well, they certainly did a good job on you You'll snake past the Dorian immigration and police like..."

"Who?" the little man said.

Jakes looked at him "Who what?"

"Pardon me I mean, who did the job?"

"The Wardrobe and Plastic Surgery people over in the Department of Dirty Tricks."

Sam Goodboy looked at him blankly

Sid Jakes said, "Oh, no."

It was the newcomer's turn to say, "I beg your pardon?"

"Never mind," Jakes said painfully "Lee Chang is our most astute recruiter She's never pulled a bad fling yet " He took in the other again and repeated, "Yet."

"Yes, sir," Goodboy said apologetically

Jakes looked at him for a long time Finally, he took a deep breath and said, "All right, here's the assignment " Something came to him and he said, "This is your first?"

"Yes."

"You've never even been on a minor assignment, as somebody's assistant or something? Something to, well, kind of blood you?"

"No, sir " The little man swallowed "Supervisor Chu just signed me up last week."

"Last *week*! What kind of training have you been through?"

"Training?"

Sid Jakes counted down for a moment Then, "Look, ah, Goodboy In the old days, it would take up to five years to turn out a Section G agent A couple of years to locate a potential with the required mental and physical elements and especially the dedication "

"Oh," the other said in a wistful sort of way. "I've got the dream. The United Planets dream."

The Section G higher-up ignored him. "Then another three years of training and apprentice-level work. Most didn't make it. It took a lot to become a full-fledged agent, complete with silver badge."

"Oh, I've got a badge," the other said proudly. His hand fumbled over his pockets. He frowned apologetically. "I'm sure I had it right here... somewhere."

Sid Jakes closed his eyes again. When he opened them the little fellow was displaying a bronze badge lettered simply, *Samuel Goodboy. Section G, Bureau of Investigation, United Planets.* It seemed to glow in the small, inoffensive man's hand.

"Who gave you that?"

"Why, Supervisor Chu."

"Oh, she did. After recruiting you only last week?"

The other nodded.

"Well, you can tell Supervisor—" Sid Jakes broke it off. "No, sir," he said. "I won't do it. She's sucked me in on others in this Special Talents gang of hers. If Lee Chang says that you're an assassin, I'll ride along with her until she takes a Brody. She's issued you a communicator and a Model H gun?"

"No, I'm afraid of guns."

There was another lengthy silence. Sid Jakes said after a while, "I get the feeling that I came into this conversation half an hour too late."

Sam Goodboy said, "She didn't think I ought to take a Section G communicator with me. Or anything else they might detect. There's only one spaceport on Dorna and the police are ever so sharp about detecting anything like a weapon, or a cloak-and-dagger device such as a Section G communicator."

Sid grunted. "She's right, as usual." His built-in optimism fought its way to the surface. "Undoubtedly, that's where your special talent comes in. You've got a better way of assassinating El Primero than with an ordinary gun. But we'll get to that later. First, let me give you a rundown on the assignment."

He settled back in his chair. "Down through the ages we've always had assassins. In the past, no man in power could adequately defend himself against a really dedicated assassin. The very term comes from

an organization which, high on Indian hemp, pulled off some of the most notable political killings on record."

Jakes began warming to his tale. "The story is told that Richard the Lion Heart was first inclined to give Hasan Ben Sabbah, the Old Man of the Mountain, and head of the assassin sect, a hard time. But when he awoke one morning, there was a knife on the pillow next to him. He doubled his guard, but the next morning there was another knife. In a rage, he again doubled his security. And the next morning, another knife. Richard made his peace with Hasan Ben Sabbah."

"Yes, sir," the other said, as though encouragingly.

"Then there were the Nihilists of Russia, at least, some of them, one wing of the organization. They were convinced they could scare the aristocracy into granting reforms. They were wrong, for various reasons, but they tried. They thought that individuals were at the root of Russia's evils. They pulled off some noteworthy assassinations, sometimes blowing up whole trains to get a Czar or a Grand Duke."

Sid Jakes shook his head. "No. In the past, a political figure had no chance against a determined, organized group which wished to assassinate him. Even individuals could pull it off given determination, since a political figure could not avoid the public. To maintain contact with people he had to show. Take the American Presidents, for example. Lincoln, at a theater, killed by a single man. Booth. McKinley, again in public, shaking hands with a long line of people. The anarchist, Czolgosz, approached with his hand supposedly in a bandage, actually concealing a gun. The first Kennedy, driving in a procession, once again killed by an individual."

Sam Goodboy said, "Yes, sir. You make your point." He cleared his throat. "Ah, what is your point?"

Sid Jakes scowled at him. How in the name of Holy Jumping Zen could Lee Chang have ever turned up this cloddy in the name of recruiting Section G operatives?

However, he went on. "The point is that almost invariably, before, the ruler, the victim of assassination, was got to by the assassin while appearing in public, a duty he could not avoid." He paused. "Today it is no longer necessary. Since the advent of radio, television and now Tri-Di, the public figure no longer need appear *in person* to the people. And today such potential victims of the assassins as El Primero never, but never, leave the security of their quarters."

Sam Goodboy nodded, and tried to project earnest intelligence, failing miserably.

Sid Jakes said, "El Primero's defense is as strong as any the human race has ever seen. If our information is correct, he has a method, utilizing brain surgery and psychedelic drugs, of insuring the total faithfulness of his bodyguard and those connected with his security. They are incapable of being seduced by his enemies, incapable of betraying him. The first troupe we sent to undermine his regime made that mistake."

Sam swallowed. "He had them shot?"

"No. He had them treated. After spilling everything they knew about Section G and the workings of United Planets they became members of his bodyguard and hold that position now."

"Oh."

Sid Jakes went on. "So we sent in another troupe. This one with orders to bring El Primero down, whatever. They decided to get him from a distance and set up some special weapons from our Department of Dirty Tricks."

"And?"

"The first troupe, now faithful members of Michael Ortega's bodyguard, knew all about such special weapons. The second group was captured by the first and became part of his bodyguard, too."

Sam winced. "You said that three troupes preceded me."

"Yes. We finally went whole hog and sent three of our top men, headed by Ronny Bronston, our best field man. We lost communication with them last week."

"And?"

"And assume they're either dead or now part of El Primero's bodyguard, completely devoted to him." Sid Jakes let a flash of his characteristic humor, albeit a bit on the sour side, come through. "So now, after the expenditure of ten of our veteran agents, we have you, Sam. With one week of seniority to your credit."

"Yes, sir," Sam said, cooperatively.

"And now, would you mind telling me just what this neat trick of yours is? Why did Lee Chang make you an agent after only one week of, uh, training?"

"Yes, sir. My special talent is I can kill people." He cleared his throat. "People, or anything else."

"*How?*" Sid Jakes blurted.

"I think them to death."

Lee Chang Chu burst into the office of Irene Kasansky, secretary extraordinary of Ross Metaxa, Commissioner of Section G, in a considerable state of excitement.

Irene looked up from her banks of orderboxes, her switches and buttons. The dourness faded from her harried face. Supervisor Chu was one of the very few in the department who was immune from the acid of Irene Kasansky. She began a greeting but Lee Chang, her face pale, snapped, "I've got to see Commissioner Metaxa."

The other had never heard that particular tone of voice from the Chinese supervisor before. She said into one of her orderboxes, "Shut up. I'll call you back later." She looked up at Lee Chang again. "The Commissioner is in conference but ..."

The feminine supervisor was sweeping past. "With Jakes?"

"Yes, but ..." Irene's voice rose. "You can't go in there now. I had definite orders that..."

But Lee Chang was past her and through the door to the sanctum sanctorum. Irene Kasansky stared after her. She caught herself, flicked a switch and bit out, "Commissioner, I told you. You've put too much on poor Lee Chang. She's obviously gone drive-happy and ..."

Ross Metaxa looked up, taken aback as his only female supervisor darted in the door, unannounced. Sloppy of dress, weary of expression and dissipated in appearance, Metaxa might be—but he was a disciplinarian.

Across from him, Sid Jakes lounged, dapper as always, hands in pockets. His eyebrows went up as well. He grinned. "That's what I love about this department," he chortled. "Informality."

"Shut up, you laughing hyena," Metaxa growled. He glowered at Lee Chang. "What'd you think this is, the ladies' room? What's the idea of bursting in..."

She ignored him and snapped at Sid Jakes, "Where's Sam?"

"Easy, easy," Sid said soothingly. "I took your word for it. Well, not

exactly I made him demonstrate You know he killed that fern I had in my office at twenty paces" He grinned and looked over at his superior "Just by concentrating on it How's that for a secret weapon? Neat trick, eh?"

Ross Metaxa looked from one of them to the other "What are you two yokes blithering about?"

Lee Chang still ignored the Commissioner of Section G She said, her voice in agony, to Sid Jakes, "Where's Sam Goodboy?"

Sid Jakes didn't understand as yet He said happily, "I tested him still further, with a chimp from the zoo A chimpanzee at a half-mile distance One minute he was as chipper as "

"Where's Sam Goodboy!"

Jakes broke it off Both he and Ross Metaxa stared at the diminutive Section G supervisor

Sid said, "Why he's on his way to his assignment on Doria I had him shuttle over to Nuevo Albuquerque yesterday By now, he's on his way"

"Get in contact immediately! Order him back!"

"Order him back?" Jakes said plaintively "You're the one that recommended him He's gone to crisp old El Primero couldn't happen to a nicer cloddy I *can't* get in touch with him He has no communicator If he had one, the secret police'd detect it They know all about the Section G communicators He's on his own"

Metaxa roared, "What in the hell is going on here?"

Lee Chang sank into a chair thin shoulders slumped She said "Ronny Bronston has broken silence"

"Broken silence," Metaxa said "He's presumed dead We haven't heard from him for at least..."

She looked up wearily, "Don't you see what must have happened? Those agents of ours who were captured and treated by Ortega's police they had communicators Doria's scientists aren't cloddies They've obviously been able to analyze the subspace band we utilized In other words, tune in on our communications Ronny must have found out and discontinued calling us"

Sid Jakes said, "He could have used code"

"Any code is breakable, especially by the stutes on police state worlds"

Ross Metaxa was scowling again He reached into a desk drawer

and brought forth a squat brown bottle and a glass He didn't offer any of the clear liquid to his subordinates, knowing better He knocked a jolt back over his palate, then growled, "Then why'd he break silence now?"

There was an embarrassed element in Lee Chang's voice She said, "We that is in our personal relationship well, for amusement, I taught him a few words of Mandarin "

"Mandarin?" Sid Jakes queried

She looked at him "Chinese It's a dead language everywhere except on Han, the planet of my birth "

"Oh," Sid said Then the meaning came home to him He laughed "Chinese Their cryptograph people would have their work cut out deciphering that What'd Ronny say?"

"He only has a few words A very few " She looked down at a note she held in a small hand "He said " For a moment her voice broke She took a deep breath and started again "He said, 'Me take Number One Me change face Me Number One '"

They bug-eyed her, speechlessly

Her eyes went from one to the other in desperation "Don't you see? Somehow, somehow Ronny has pulled off the biggest romp of his career He's kidnapped Michael Ortega Somehow He's evidently undergone plastic surgery Somehow, he's taken El Primero's place "

Metaxa said hoarsely, "Did he say anything else?"

"Yes The rest of the message was, 'Me make big talk No more Number One.'"

Sid Jakes, who had been sitting erect in unwonted fashion, said excitedly, "He's going to address the whole planet All of Doria Make some sort of announcement Free elections, after his abdication, or something."

"Impossible," Metaxa rumbled "Fantastic " He glared at Lee Chang "How do you know it was really Ronny?"

"Who else on Doria would know Mandarin, or, even if they did, know enough to beam a message to Section G in that tongue?"

"Kidnap El Primero?" Sid Jakes said in second thought "What kind of drivel-happy curd is that? We all know he's the most security-conscious dictator in United Planets How could you ever kidnap the funker, not to speak of substituting someone else in his place?"

Lee Chang looked at him strangely and spoke hesitantly as though she hated to say the words "I can think of only one possibility. According to our dossier on Michael Ortega he has one Achilles heel. Remember Svetlana Alliluyeva? Or, better, Svetlana Stalin?"

Sid Jakes bothered to shake his head. Metaxa merely poured himself another drink of Denebian tequila and waited for her to go on.

"The only person Joseph Stalin evidently really cared for," Lee Chang said. "His daughter and one of the very few relatives, friends and associates that long survived him. Well, from what I hear Michael Ortega has the equivalent in Concha Ortega."

Metaxa growled, "What's this got to do with Bronston and his taking over the position of El Primero?"

Lee Chang made a feminine gesture with her slight shoulders. "It wouldn't be the first time our quiet, unassuming Ronald has made his mark with the ladies. Remember Amazonia?"

Sid laughed suddenly. "So one of our teams tried to bribe El Primero's guards. The second troupe tried to blow him up from a distance. But Ronny turns on the Bronston charm and—" Sid Jakes ground to a halt. "Holy jumping Zen," he yelped. "Sam Goodboy. He's zeroing in on Ronny!"

Ross Metaxa spun in his chair and hurled into his orderbox, "Irene! Sam Goodboy, a new agent. On assignment to Doria. What's his cover?"

Lee Chang and Sid Jakes failed to make out the answer.

Metaxa snapped, "Find out, soonest. A mistake has been made. He's on assignment to kill Ronny Bronston."

"And he never fails," Lee Chang added, her voice so low as hardly to be made out.

"And he never fails," Metaxa repeated into the interoffice communicator.

For a moment, Irene Kasansky held silence, then she said, the usual rasp gone from her voice, "I didn't handle Goodboy's cover. I'll check immediately."

Metaxa looked back at his two top supervisors.

Sid Jakes chortled, "Get that sudden change in voice. Irene's sugar on our Ronny."

Metaxa glared at him, but then turned his eyes to Lee Chang. "What'd you mean he never fails?" he questioned sourly. "Anybody

can fail, no matter how proficient Certainly, professional killers can "

Lee Chang was shaking her head "Ross . this one doesn't use weapons He's one of my Special Talents recruits "

Her superior looked at her in puzzlement "You mean judo or one of those other old..."

She was still shaking her head "He doesn't know how he does it " She added, as though that explained everything, "He comes from the planet Rubata."

"Rubata!" Jakes snorted "Those crackpots "

She turned to him, frowning again "If you will " She went back to Metaxa. "You'll recall the planet was originally colonized by would-be witches, spiritualists, psi adepts, or would be adepts, so forth and so on?"

"Vaguely," Metaxa growled "As Sid says, crackpots " He took down his drink

Lee Chang shrugged prettily "I would have said the same, until I began my search for special talents to recruit for Section G Quite a few of them have come from Rubata I don't pretend to explain, however, few would deny that down through the ages the human race has produced some, well, out of-the-ordinary persons Do you deny, for instance, that occasionally a human turns up with total recall? That others have the ability to do mathematical problems in their heads that put computers to shame? I won't mention such oft-recorded phenomena as telepathy, clairvoyance and even precognition "

"Al, right," Metaxa growled "So from time to time offbeat talents have shown I'll accept that, in a limited way What's it got to do with this Sam Goodboy?"

"The original colonists of Rubata numbered but a few thousand," Lee Chang pursued "However, they bred - with each other " She shrugged again "Not only did the posterity continue and strengthen the, as you say, offbeat talents, but evolved some new ones Among the original colonists were witch doctors and libants, sorcerers and wizards, hex doctors and shamanists, practitioners of black magic, of voodoo, of the left-hand path Admittedly, as Sid has put it, largely crackpots But you can't explain away, with that term alone, all the evidence that has come down to us through the ages of such items as Bantu witchmen, voodoo priests and hex doctors killing persons through their special talents At any rate, Sam's own belief is that

he numbers at least several of these among his ancestors not to speak of telepaths, clairvoyants and so forth The thing is this talent of his *works* "

The orderbox spoke up Irene said, "Commissioner I've tracked down Goodboy's cover He's going in as a tourist Doria makes a play for tourism, it's supposed to be very scenic and they evidently can use the interplanetary credits."

"All right all right How's he getting there? We'll have to contact him on his ship."

"He's on the Space Passenger Freighter *Mola* " She hesitated, then added, "Commissioner, it's a Dorian spacecraft "

"That doesn't make any difference We'll contact him in our own code."

Lee Chang said emptily, "He isn't checked out on Section G code Commissioner Even if he was, Dorian security is familiar with our codes Remember, they number two of our former troupes in their secret police."

Sid Jakes was on his feet He bent over the orderbox "Irene," he snapped "Get a move on Arrangements for Supervisor Chu and myself to depart soonest for Doria If necessary requisition a Space Forces four-manner."

Ross Metaxa scowled at him "We can't risk your neck on a drivel-happy romp like this."

Jakes looked at him bleakly "Ronny Bronston is my best field man, Ross On top of that, Doria is one of the biggest sore thumbs in United Planets right now If that planet spills all it knows about the inner workings of Section G, then the member planets will begin dropping out of the confederation like hail "

Lee Chang was standing as well "I'll get ready," she said

The trip was an agony.

They were lobbed over to Nuevo Albuquerque to the spaceport And jittered while waiting for the small Space Forces craft which had to be recalled from Callisto.

"Isn't there any way this could be speeded up?" Lee Chang murmured, knowing as well as her colleague that there wasn't

Sid Jakes looked at her in understanding "There is no speed in

hyperspace, Lee Chang, you know that Before entering it, yes After leaving it, yes But in hyperspace, there is no speed The most sluggish freighter gets there as fast as the nattiest Space Forces one-man scout."

"Sam'll be on Doria two days before we arrive, then "

He didn't bother to answer that

They spent most of their time on the *Gremlin* in the tiny mess They tried to play battle chess to kill the time, but couldn't concentrate They sought out the ship's small library and played tapes, but only the lightest fictional things would come through And even then they were hard put to follow the story line

They must have been halfway when Lee Chang blurted, "*Why*? Why is it that after all these centuries of supposed civilization we wind up with such worlds as Doria? Why should there be a need for a Section G, to attempt to contain such planets? How did they ever evolve? How can man be so stupid?"

Sid Jakes grinned sourly "You know the answer as well as I do Weren't you born in a commune, on the planet Han, settled by disgruntled followers of what was his name, that early Chinese communist?"

"Mao " Lee Chang murmured unhappily

Sid Jakes grunted amusement "The pioneers in space travel must never have dreamed of the method by which the suitable worlds would be colonized Every group that figured they weren't getting a fair shake, took off like a bat out of hell for a world of their own " He chortled "It was bad enough when outfits such as the anarchists settled their own planet, but you know what I ran into the other day?"

She looked at him Anything to divert her mind

He laughed ruefully "A couple of thousand colonists with I Q 's of less than one hundred Some of them, considerably less They figured they were a minority and had to take too much jetsam So they've found their own world They refuse to join United Planets, by the way."

Lee Chang's face mirrored the nearest thing to a scowl of which it was capable "But Sid, what in the world will happen to them?"

He shrugged "Who knows? Perhaps they'll go back to Neanderthal Or, who knows? Perhaps the ruggedness of existence will be such that

they'll breed up their I Q 's The fit will survive, the too stupid go under It's the way the race started "

She returned to her point "But what I meant was, now that humanity is faced with a common danger the intelligent alien life form that we've finally come in contact with Why don't we meet it together?"

Sid chuckled ruefully, and gave up trying to look at the historical fiction Tri-Di show they'd been projecting "Lee Chang, Lee Chang, you dreamer Man stops being a thinking animal when you deal with his institutions, his subconscious beliefs his religion The Christians were willing to die in the arena before giving up their creed The Aztecs fought it out almost to the last man, although Cortez daily offered them surprisingly good terms, in view of the fact that they didn't have a chance Hitler tried to the very last to bring down the whole Third Reich in flames, rather than surrender Earlier in that same war, the Russian communists slugged it out long, long after the world thought that the Wehrmacht had defeated them

"No, it's a fallacy to think man will give up his beliefs to meet a common danger When the H bomb first threatened universal destruction, did man patch up his politico-economic difficulties? You know he didn't *Better dead than red* was one slogan, and the other side had just as strong ones When the population explosion threatened to lead to complete chaos, did the old religions the old institutions in such lands as Europe and India change? Not by a long shot They kept breeding like rabbits Man is at his most stubborn when his religious, political or socio-economic beliefs need change "

She sighed deeply and her eyes went back to the Tri-Di stage

They were met at the Doria spaceport by what could have been described as an honor guard of twenty men However, they had no illusions Before landing, the ensign who skippered the four-man crew of the little *Gremlin* had been required to state the purpose of the set-down, and to enumerate the passengers who expected to disembark They had made no effort to disguise their identities, if for no other reason than that there had been no time to improvise a cover, had that been possible, considering the craft in which they had arrived

The guard snapped to attention and presented arms, as Lee Chang

Chu and Sid Jakes emerged from the United Planets Space Forces ship.

A nattily uniformed officer approached and came to the salute "Supervisor Jakes, Supervisor Chu," he clipped out "Welcome to Doria "

Sid Jakes grinned at him, ruefully "Hi, Desmond " He held out a hand.

The other hesitated, then shook "It's been a long time, Sid "

Sid Jakes turned to Lee Chang and said, "Do you two know each other?"

Desmond bowed over her hand "We operated in different sections, but I have heard a great deal of Supervisor Chu "

Lee Chang said demurely, "Thank you "

Sid Jakes chuckled "We hardly expected quite this reception, Desmond How are the rest of the boys?"

The other was a man in his mid-thirties Healthy, at least on the surface, adjusted and at ease His eyes were as clear as those of his former superior He smiled, a faint mocking quality in the background "Like myself For the first time in life, really happy and at peace with themselves Doria is a great planet, Sid "

The smile on Sid Jakes's face faded He said, his voice slightly tight "Nothing like being coked to the gills to make the world rosy "

But the Dorian security officer only laughed "If you don't understand it, Sid, don't knock it Somebody once wrote that censors were mostly illiterates Suffice to say, we former Section G agents, now serving El Primero, are considerably happier than we were taking orders from Ross Metaxa and trying to live up to the way *he* thought things ought to be."

Sid said snappishly, "And does El Primero needle himself with the same happy dust he gives you?"

There was the most distant of glints in the other's eye, but he said, still pleasantly, "Sid, you remind me of those fat old ladies I saw depicted on a historical fiction Tri-D: show not so long ago They belonged to an outfit called the WCTU, an anti-alcohol organization. They'd beat the drums against drinking guzzle and then after the meeting serve refreshments of cakes, cookies, pies, candy and well-sweetened lemonade or tea I imagine nobody ever got around to

telling them that alcohol and sugar do much the same thing in the human body After the meeting, they'd go home and lie around eating chocolates and fouling up their health by going to lard "

Lee Chang said mildly, "There are some small differences between guzzle and candy."

Desmond looked at her If he had lost any of his composure, he had regained it now He said, "Either, taken moderately won't hurt you Either, taken in excess, can jetsam your health, irreparably " He switched the subject "May I ask that you accompany me to Interrogation? A formality, upon landing on Doria "

They followed A noncommissioned officer bit out a command and the guard very briskly wheeled and fell in behind

At the edge of the field they entered an attractive administration building and, now followed only by the noncom and two of his men, proceeded down a short hall to a door lettered, in small, simple gold type, *Interrogation*.

The room beyond was most comfortably furnished A desk, several comfortable chairs, a small bar in a corner

The ex-Section G agent went through the formalities, held a chair for Lee Chang, offered them both a drink, which they refused in view of the morning hour He finally took his place behind the desk The two soldiers had remained outside the door The noncom had entered behind them and stood to one side, his face expressionless, however, his side arm was in a quick-draw holster

Sid Jakes said testily, "You had the last word on that WCTU thing and that 'if you don't comprehend it, don't knock it,' routine Would you mind elaborating?"

"Not at all," Desmond smiled "You've got the United Planets dream, Jakes I've got the Dorian dream It's an easier dream All we want is for Doria to be left alone, and leave others alone, including any bogeyman alien life forms You're patriotic the old term You come from Earth, the mother planet You bleed for Earth and want to impose on all the rest of the humanity-settled planets the things that Earth stands for To accomplish this, you beat the drums about the need to unite against an alien foe It's a new takeoff on the old Roman adage, if you have trouble at home stir up war abroad "

"You think patriotism is stupid?"

Desmond smiled still once again "It's according to what epoch

you're living in. In early society, it was a necessity if the tribe—or, later, the city-state—was to survive. But in later society, if indulged in, it meant suicide for the whole race."

Lee Chang said hesitantly, "I don't believe that I quite follow that."

The Dorian security officer looked at her and nodded. "In the old days, before man left his home world, you had a multitude of nations. A man would say, 'I'm proud to be an Englishman. God save the king. I'm patriotic. I'd die for England.' And often he did. Why was he proud to be an Englishman? He hadn't done anything to achieve that status. By an accident of fate, he had parents who were living in England at the time of his birth. Had he been born in India, he could then have been proud of being an Indian, and willing to kill other nationalities—including English—in the name of patriotism. It particularly became nonsense after the advent of nuclear fission."

He waved a hand negatively. "Patriotism belongs to the childhood of the species. But let us get to the point. The purpose of your landing on Doria. In view of your office—"

Sid Jakes said, "I'll be glad to tell you all about it."

Desmond nodded. "Do you mind if I put a truth beam on you?"

Sid Jakes hesitated only momentarily. "Of course not."

A light, centered on the desk, lit up, white.

Desmond said, "In the way of test. Are you opposed to the government of El Primero?"

"Yes," Sid said.

The light burned green.

"Do you think Supervisor Lee Chang Chu an ugly woman?"

Sid grinned. "Yes," he said. "Very ugly."

The light burned red. Both Desmond and Lee Chang smiled.

Desmond smilingly said, "Have you stopped beating your mother?"

Sid chuckled. "Well, yes and no," he said.

The light remained white.

Desmond said, his voice sharper now, "What is the purpose of your visit to Doria?"

"To apprehend a killer and return with him to Earth, before he can commit a murder."

The Dorian security officer's eyes widened infinitesimally, and he darted a glance at the light, which turned green.

"Where did the killer come from?"

"Earth." The light was green.

"You say he came here to kill someone?"

"Yes." The light was green.

"Who?"

Sid Jakes said very slowly, "El Primero Michael Ortega." The light was green.

The other was suddenly on his feet, his face chalk his voice shrill "That is impossible!"

Sid Jakes shook his head "Do you think that I, assistant to Commissioner Metaxa, would be here on a mission less important?"

The other, his eyes bugging, leaned over the desk his fists supporting him "Section G has been trying to destroy El Primero and his government Do you contend that now you are trying to prevent him from being assassinated?"

Sid Jakes answered evenly "Supervisor Chu and I have come from Earth to save the life of the present E. Primero."

The light burned green.

The other stared at it, momentarily, then brought his eyes back to the Section G second-in-command "It is impossible to assassinate El Primero His security is impregnable Even now he is preparing to address the entire population on a matter of the utmost importance, but he will never leave the palace grounds."

Lee Chang spoke softly "Do you think we are not familiar with all this, Citizen? But no security can thwart this killer That is why we are here."

The light burned green, acknowledging the truth of her statement

The other slumped back in his chair, his mouth working, a trickle of saliva at its side

"Sir!" the noncom said anxiously

"Shut up!" his superior rasped Then to Jakes, "Who?"

Sid Jakes shook his head "I must have assurance that if and when we apprehend him, we will be allowed to return with him to Earth."

"No, we of the Dorian police will see to him We protect El Primero with our lives. Our very souls!"

Sid Jakes shook his head again "This is not an ordinary assassin, Desmond You have not the time to put pressure on us He may strike momentarily Your guarantee, sent in a subspace cable to the Octagon,

on Earth, that he will be put in our custody, or we do not reveal his identity. Otherwise, I guarantee the present El Primero will die shortly."

The light burned green, and the security officer, once again, stared unbelievingly at it.

Psycho-altered he might be, but his reflexes were still the same as those required, years before, when his application as a Section G operative had been accepted. He flicked on an orderbox.

"Crash priority! Clear channels to Generalissimo Chavez!"

At the door of the room in the tourist hotel, Sid Jakes turned to the three security officers who were escorting him and Lee Chang.

He said, "I suggest that you remain here, until we have dealt with him. This is the most dangerous man in all United Planets."

Desmond said, "Our orders are to cooperate with you to the utmost."

Sid Jakes knocked and, without waiting for an answer, flung open the door. Lee Chang entered first. They didn't want to startle the other, and were aware that Sam Goodboy knew her the best.

The drab little man was in the process of seating himself before the room's Tri-Di stage. He looked up in surprise. "Why, Supervisor Chu!" he said. He blinked and his eyes went in turn to Sid Jakes. Sid closed the door behind him, blocking the view of the security men beyond.

Lee Chang blurted, "Sam! Everything has been changed! You mustn't kill El Primero."

He looked at her blankly, and then at Sid Jakes. He was aghast. He said in distress, "But — but I have already killed him."

Lee Chang collapsed into a chair. "Oh, no."

For the briefest of moments, Sid Jakes closed his eyes in pain. Ronald Bronston had not only been his best operative, but he was also a close personal friend. But then he brought himself back to the immediate reality.

He snapped, "The fat's in the fire now. We've got to rescue what we can. We've got to get out of here someway, and back to the *Gremlin*. Ronny's gone, and there's nothing we can do about it. It was nobody's deliberate fault."

Sam Goodboy was looking back and forth between them, his face in dismay, ineffectual-appearing as never before. He said plaintively, "I—I don't understand. I—I followed orders exactly. I've never done this sort of thing before. On my home planet I used to work occasionally for the police. Some escaped mad killer or something like that."

Sid's eyes had been darting about the room, looking for another exit. There was none. He went to the window and stared down. Four stories of smooth wall.

"You killed the wrong man," he bit out.

"But...I never kill the wrong man."

"One of our agents, Ronny Bronston, somehow infiltrated the palace and took Ortega's place."

"Oh, *that*," Sam Goodboy said, in relief.

"Oh, *that*," Lee Chang echoed. "You're talking about—"

"Oh, I didn't kill *Ronny*," Sam explained seriously. "My orders were to kill El Primero, not somebody disguised as him. And just in time, too. He had managed to escape from where Ronny had him locked up and was about to reorganize his men to recapture the palace. Oh, he's very dead."

The Tri-Di stage lit up, and there, standing alone, simply garbed in a Dorian enlisted man's uniform, without decoration, stood a strong-faced, domineering personality.

The three-dimensional figure, lifelike save in size, stared out at them for a moment, then spoke. "Citizens of Doria!" he began. "I have a most important message."

"There's Ronny now," Sam Goodboy said in satisfaction.

Sid Jakes stared at him, as did Lee Chang, then both turned and stared at the Tri-Di figure, now fully launched into its epic speech.

"How did you know?" Sid demanded.

The little man squirmed. "I don't know," he said in apology. "It all just kind of comes to me. But I never make mistakes. I never kill the wrong person. That would be awful."

This is the first science fiction story I ever sold and until the NESFA researchers dug it out I hadn't known it had ever been published. Jerry Bixby, then editing Planet Stories, *bought it in early 1949. It didn't appear until 1954 under the title "The Galactic Ghost," and by that time I was on the move and never got a copy. The magazine folded about that time and I thought it was never to be seen in print. But here it is! My first.*

Last Warning

DESPITE THE WIDELY PUBLICIZED radar posts encircling our nation and the continuously alerted jet squadrons at its borders, the space ship was about to land before it was detected.

It settled gracefully, quietly, onto an empty field in northern New Jersey. And so unexpected was the event, so unbelievable the fact that man was being visited by aliens from space, that it was a full half hour before the first extra was on the streets in New York, and forty minutes before the news buzzed through the Kremlin.

It might have taken considerably longer for man in Earth's more isolated areas to hear of the event had not the alien taken a hand at this point. Approximately an hour after the landing, into the mind of every human on Earth, irrespective of nation, language, age, or intellect, came the thought telepathically:

We come in Peace. Prepare to receive our message.

It was a month before the message came.

During that period more than ninety-nine per cent of the Earth's population became aware of the visitor from space. Radio, television, newsreel, telegraph and newspapers reached the greater number, but word of mouth and even throbbing drums played their part. In four weeks, savages along the Amazon and shepherds in Sinkiang knew that visitors had arrived with a message for man.

And all awaited the message: scientist and soldier, politician and revolutionist, millionaire and vagrant, bishop and whirling dervish, banker and pickpocket, society matron and street walker. And each was hoping for one thing and afraid he'd hear another.

All efforts at communication with the alien ship had failed. The various welcoming delegations from the State of New Jersey, from the United States and even from the United Nations were ignored. No sign of life aboard was evident, and there seemed no means of entrance to the spacecraft. It sat there impassively, its tremendous, saucer-like shape seemed almost like a beautiful monument.

At the end of a month, when world-wide interest in the visitor from space was at its height, the message came. And once again it was impressed upon the mind of every human being on Earth.

Man, know this. Your world is fated to complete destruction. Ordinarily, we of the Galactic Union would not have contacted man until he had progressed much further and was ready to take his place among us. But this emergency makes necessary that we take immediate steps if your kind is to be saved from complete obliteration.

In order to preserve your race, we are making efforts to prepare another planet, an uninhabited one, to receive your colonists. Unfortunately, our means for transporting you to your new world are limited, only a handful can be taken. You are safe for another five of your Earth years. At the end of that period we will return. Have a thousand of your people ready for their escape.

The President of the United States lifted an eyebrow wearily and rapped again for order.

"Gentlemen, please! Let us get back to the fundamental question. Summed up, it amounts to this: only one thousand persons, out of a world population of approximately two billion, are going to be able to escape the Earth's destruction. In other words, one out of every two million. It is going to be most difficult to choose."

Herr Ernst Oberfeld tapped his glasses fretfully on the conference table "Mr President, it need not be quite as bad as all that After all, we must choose the Earth's best specimens to carry on our race I believe we will find that the combined populations of Europe and North America total somewhat less than a billion If we go still further and eliminate all inferior..."

Monsieur Pierre Duclos flushed "Herr Oberfeld should keep in mind that his presence at this meeting at all was opposed vigorously by some of the delegates Isn't it somewhat too soon after his country's debacle to again broadcast its super-race theories?"

The British representative spoke up "My dear Duclos, although I agree with you completely in essence, still it must be pointed out that if we were to handle this allocation on a strictly numerical basis, then our Chinese friends would be allotted something like 200 colonists, while Great Britain would have perhaps twenty "

Maxim Gregoroff grunted, "Hardly enough for the Royal Family, eh?"

Lord Harriman was on his feet "Sir, I might echo what Monsieur Duclos has said to Herr Oberfeld It was in spite of the protest from a considerable number of delegates to this conference that your nation is represented at all."

Gregoroff's fist thumped on the table and his face went beet red "It is as expected' You plan to monopolize the escape ship for the imperialistic nations' The atom bomb will probably be used to destroy all other countries!"

The President of the United States held up his hand This whole thing was getting more chaotic by the minute As a matter of fact, instructions from Congress were that he explain that the United States expected to have at least one third of the total This, in view of the fact that the aliens had landed in New Jersey, obviously seeing that the United States was the foremost nation of the world, and, further, in view of the fact that this country was a melting pot of all nations and consequently produced what might be called the "average" member of the human race

However that would have to wait Order had to be brought to this conference if anything was to be accomplished

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, please!" he called "These accusations We are getting nowhere I have taxen the liberty to make arrangements to

have the representative of the newly formed Congress of American Sciences address you. Are you agreeable?" He raised his eyebrows inquiringly, and meeting no objection pressed the button on the table before him.

Professor Manklethorp was ushered in, bobbed his head to the assembled delegates and came to the point immediately. "The problem which you are discussing has many ramifications. I would like to bring to your attention a few which should be examined with care.

"First, the choice of colonists must not be on a national basis, nor on one based upon political or monetary prominence. If it is, we, as a race, are doomed. This new planet, no matter how well prepared for us by the Galactic Union, is going to be a challenge such as man has never faced before. This challenge cannot be met by politicians, no matter how glib, nor by wealthy men, no matter how many dollars they possess, nor by titled ones, no matter how old and honored their names. We must pick trained specialists who will be able to meet the problems that arise in the new world.

"Our congress recommends that all persons, of all nations, who have college degrees be given thorough tests both for I.Q. and for accumulated knowledge, and that the highest thousand be chosen irrespective of nation or race."

Pandit Hari Kumar smiled quietly. "May I ask the learned professor a question?"

"Of course. That is why I am here. We want only to have this matter decided on a strictly scientific basis."

"My poverty-stricken country has a population of possibly one fifth of the world total, but fewer university men than one of your large cities might boast. Your desire to choose men by their I.Q. has its merits, but I have no doubt that in my country we have men of tremendous intelligence who cannot even read or write, aside from having a university degree. Must my widely illiterate people go unrepresented in the new world?"

A muscle twitched in the professor's face. "Needless to say, the Congress of American Sciences has considered that. However, we must view this matter in a spirit of sacrifice. The best of the world's population must go to the new world. Possibly whole nations will go without representation. It is too bad — but, unfortunately, necessary."

Sven Carlesen put up his finger for recognition. "It seems to me

there is another serious loophole in the professor's recommendation He wants the thousand to be made up of university graduates of high I Q and considerable accumulated knowledge I am afraid I foresee the new world being populated with elderly scholars " He smiled "Like the professor himself, who, I understand, has a phenomenal I.Q."

Monsieur Ducios nodded "He is right We must consider the need to send perfect physical specimens " He looked down at his own small and bent body "Gentlemen," he said wryly, "has it occurred to you that none of us here at this conference are suitable to be represented among the thousand?"

They ignored him

A pale-faced delegate in black, who had thus far said nothing, spoke up softly, "I have been instructed to inform you that our organization demands that all of the colonists be of the true faith "

His words were drowned by the shouting of half a dozen of the conference delegates Loud above them all could be heard the bellow of Maxim Gregoroff.

"Our Union now includes the population of approximately half the world Our allotment, consequently, will be five hundred colonists of the thousand We will choose them by our own methods "

Lord Harriman murmured, "Undoubtedly, by starting at the top of the party membership list and taking the first five hundred names beginning with your leader "

The President of the United States ran his hand through his hair and then roughly down the side of his face A messenger handed him a slip of paper He read it and intensified his pounding on the table

"Gentlemen," he shouted "If Professor Mankiethorp is through, we have here a request from the International Physical Culture Society to have their representative heard "

"I know," Sven Carlesen said "He wants all of the colonists to be able to chin themselves twenty-five times as the first requisite "

At the end of the five-year period the space ship came again, settling into the identical field where it had first landed This time a delegation awaited it, and a multitude that stretched as far as the eye could see

A telepathic message came from the visitor from space almost immediately.

Choose from your number three representatives to discuss the situation with us

Within ten minutes, three advanced and entered the ship by way of a port that opened before them as they approached. Among their number was Pierre Duclos. A passage stretched before them, and seeing no one, they hesitated a moment before following it to its further end. Monsieur Duclos led the way, depending only slightly on his cane to aid his bent body.

A door opened and they were confronted by the figure of a man seated at a desk. It was several moments before they realized that the entity before them was masked so cleverly that they had been led to believe him human.

He said in faultless English, "I note that you have penetrated my disguise. I thought it would be easier for you if I hid my true appearance. Until your people are used to alien life forms, I must use this measure."

Monsieur Duclos bowed. "We appreciate your consideration, but I assure you that our..."

The alien waved a gloved hand. "Please, no argument. My appearance would probably nauseate you. But it is of no importance. Pray be seated." He noted the cane, and nodded to the little Frenchman. "You, sir, must be highly thought of to rate being chosen one of the thousand in view of your age and health."

Although he was not at ease in the presence of the representative of the Galactic Union, Monsieur Duclos allowed himself a wry smile. "You misunderstand. I am not one of the colonists. My presence here at this meeting is an honor that has been awarded me in return for some small services in aiding in the selection of the favored ones."

"And what were these services?"

"Of no real importance. I suppose you might say that the most important was that I was the first to refuse to be a colonist."

Bently, one of the other Earthmen, spoke up. "Had it not been for Pierre Duclos, it is doubtful if the thousand would have been chosen, and even possible that there would be no Earth to which to return for your colonists."

Behind the mask the eyes of the alien gleamed. "Enlighten me further, please."

Duclos demurred "You honor me overmuch, Mr Bently Let us approach the problem of the colonists and their transportation "

But John Bently went on "For more than two years after your ship's departure, complete confusion reigned in regard to selection of the thousand Happily, all-out warfare between nations had been avoided, although conditions were rapidly coming to a point where it was momentarily expected

"Each race, each nation, each religion, even each sex thought they should have the greater representation And each of these groups in turn were divided into subgroups by wealth, age, class, education and others Almost everyone on Earth knew of some reason why he should be one of the colonists And most of us were willing to take any steps to make our desire come true."

The alien said, "That was to be expected And then?"

"And then Pierre Duclos formed his Society for Racial Preservation whose first requisite for membership was a refusal to become one of the colonists The purpose of the organization was to find the thousand most suitable colonists without regard to race, nationality, creed, color, education, class, wealth or any other grouping

"At first, the growth of membership was slow, but, after a time, man saw that his chance of survival as an individual was practically nil, that his chance of being chosen was at best less than one in two million When he realized this, his next desire was to make sure that, even though he as an individual was doomed, the race survived Membership in the society grew rapidly and internationally The members, you might say, were fanatical Why not? They knew that they had less than five years to live Why not sacrifice those last years of life to such a noble cause?

"As the society grew in strength nothing could stand before it Governments that stood in the way were overthrown, social systems abolished, prejudices and institutions that had stood for centuries were wiped out It became necessary to institute world government, to guarantee to all equal opportunity Step by step, the society took the measures necessary to insure the selection of the best specimens Earth had to offer

"And scientific development was pushed to the utmost We wished to send our colonists off with as much as Earth could possibly give

them We eliminated a dozen diseases that have plagued us for centuries, we devised a thousand new tools and techniques "

"In short," said the alien, "because of this stimulus man has progressed as much in these past few years as he could have expected in the next fifty."

"That is correct," Pierre Duclos said "It is unfortunate that now we have on our threshold a world really worth living in that it is fated to be destroyed."

"I see," said the alien, while what would have been a human smile on a human face flickered on his "I am glad to report that the danger which confronted the Earth has been removed and the need to populate the new planet with colonists in order to preserve your race is now eliminated

"Gentlemen, the Earth is safe Man may go on with his plans without fear of destruction."

Monsieur Duclos fingered his cane thoughtfully while the other two Earthmen jumped to their feet, thumped each other's backs, shouted, and otherwise demonstrated their joy They finally dashed from the room and from the spacecraft to give the news to the world

The alien eyed the little Frenchmen "And why have you remained?"

"I do not believe the world was faced with destruction, monsieur I have come to the conclusion that you have perpetrated a farce upon mankind."

The alien sat himself down at the desk again "I see you will need an explanation But you are wrong, you know Faced with destruction you were The destruction, however, was not a matter of collision with some other body, or whatever you might have imagined The destruction would have come from within Man was on the verge of destroying himself One more conflict or, at most, two would have done it

"The Galactic Union has long been aware of man, who has developed mechanically in a phenomenal manner but has not been able to develop socially to the point where his science is less than a danger This ship was sent to you in hopes of accomplishing exactly what has been accomplished We believed your racial instinct would be strong enough to unite you when the race as a whole thought it was threatened with extinction."

The alien got to his feet "I am afraid we must leave now Let me say that I hope that man will soon be able to take his place in the Galactic Union."

Monsieur Ducios winced "The Galactic Union," he said "The League of Nations and the United Nations were bad enough" He smiled wryly "And I thought that with the establishment of a world government, we had abolished such conferences forever I can just see myself as the first delegate from Earth Heaven forbid!"

All right, all right. I know what you'll think about this one. However, I stick to my guns. As a life-long student of socio-economics, I contend that none of the current economists have come up with a more convincing account of why and how a depression starts and how to end one. This yarn originally appeared in Analog *and was later greatly expanded to book length for* Ace.

Depression or Bust

THE WAY THE COMPUTERS checked back on it later, it all began at the home of Marvin and Phoebe Sellers, 4011 Camino de Palmas, Tucson, Arizona.

Marv Sellers, at 7:30 PM on a Friday in May, was going over his assets and liabilities, in the two-bedroom pseudo-ranchhouse they had been making payments on for the past five years. It had taken him a good two hours before he came up with his history-shaking conclusions.

He grimaced when his pencil made a black mark on the end of his nose. "Phoebe," he said, "there is no other way of working it out. No other way."

"How'd you mean, Marv?" Phoebe said. She was heating up three dinners.

"That new deepfreeze'll hafta go back. What the hell was wrong with the old one, anyways?"

"The old one?" She thought about it, not particularly upset. The

Sellers family didn't really need a deepfreeze The freeze compartment of the refrigerator was sufficient, their diet consisting largely of prepared frozen and canned meals

"Why, Marv, you know we had that old deepfreeze nearly onto four years The new ones got a lot of improvements It was in all the ads, on the Tri-Di and all And we got a good turn-in price on the old one"

"Old one wasn't even paid for yet," Marv said gloomily "What new improvements, fer crissakes?"

"Well, the old one was colored white like Nobody has a white deepfreeze any more Out of date"

Marv said, "Anyway, we gotta send this one back to the store We just can't stretch out the payments, what with the house and the car and the furniture and swimming pool and that there vacation we took — rocket now, pay later."

"They ain't going to like that at the store"

"Then they'll hafta lump it."

Old Sam had come in toward the end of the conversation He said, "Back when I was a boy, we usta have an icebox Ice man usta come around in an ice wagon Us kids usta swipe small pieces of ice offen the wagon and suck on them We usta have fun in those days Kids watch Tri-Di now."

"I'll bet, Gramps," Marv muttered

Harry came around to Jim Withers and said, "Boss, I just got a call from Marv Sellers Says he can't keep up the payments on that deepfreeze he bought a few weeks ago"

Jim Withers glowered at his sole clerk

Harry shrugged "Not my fault"

Jim Withers thought about it He looked around the shop darkly

He said finally, "Maybe we can resell it for new Listen, call the distributor up in Phoenix and tell him to cancel that order for three new deepfreezes We're overstocked in here Hardly get around"

"O K" Harry said "But the customers like to see a variety Green, pink, cerise violet gotta match their other kitchen things"

"Let me worry about that," Withers snarled "And listen How're those gadgets moving?"

"What gadgets, Mr. Withers?"

"The nuclear martini stirrers, the electric combs, the electric

toothbrushes and the nuclear backscratchers At any rate, they're all on consignment Send 'em back "

Jim Withers turned on his heel and entered his small office He was in a vile mood and the cancellation didn't help any.

He sat down and thought for a while, then switched on the phone and dialed

When a girl appeared in the screen, he said, "Let me have Bill Waters."

When Bill Waters appeared in the screen, Withers said, half defiantly, half apologetically, "Listen, Bill I'm going to have to postpone that Buick Cayuse air-cushion "

Waters argued, and ended up with, "You're a three-car family, Jim You need that Cayuse."

"I can do without it for a while," Withers said "Maybe I'll drop around and see what you have on the used-car lot "

"You're the boss, Jim Any time But I sure think you ought to reconsider on the Cayuse You realize these new models have nearly a thousand horses under the hood?"

Jim Withers sighed and said, "See you later, Bill "

"O K " Bill Waters flicked off the screen and turned to his secretary

He grimaced and said, "Hell "

"I beg your pardon," the secretary said

"Miss Harding, write to Detroit and tell them to cut back on our allotment Oh, two cars a month, in each line Tell them I'll up it again when business picks up."

"Gosh, Mr Waters All on account of one cancellation? This year started off awful good."

He looked at her glumly "I can sense a trend Jim Withers must be taking a beating in that appliance store of his Cars'll be next I don't want to be overstocked with this six-monthly model "

He sat there in thought for a while Finally, he switched on the phone again and dialed unhappily

When the screen lit up, he said, "Frank, I've been thinking over that new house I think we better shelve it for now "

Marv Sellers came into the house from the back, the way he always did when he returned from work He threw his hat on the kitchen table in disgust.

Old Sam looked up from where he sat in his rocker and said "What's wrong?"

"Where's Phoebe?"

"She ain't home from work yet."

"Well, the contractor just laid me off," Marv said "Me and eight of the other guys, fer crissakes."

"What happened?"

"Ahhh, the house we was going to be working on, the guy who wanted to buy it changed his mind That Bill Waters over to the Buick agency Business must be bad Well, it's me for rocking-chair money for awhile But you can't make ends meet on a hundred a week unemployment insurance " He grunted disgust "We'll, hafta send back that new couch and easy chair Phoebe bought "

The old man said, "Lucky you still got the old ones out to the garage Business bad eh" I'll hafta talk that over with the boys in the park in the morning."

Marv opened the refrigerator for a plastic of beer

"Glad Phoebe's working " he grumbled "Don't know how long it'll be before I get another job."

Phoebe came in and he told her about it

She was her usual placid self.

"It's not important," she soothed him "You'll have another job in no time at all. But meanwhile, it takes a little thinking We'll have to retrench, like they say."

She laughed sourly "This would have to happen on the night I wanted you to take me to June Perriwinkle's restaurant Now I think I'd just better cook something here "

"Well, that's one good thing " Marv snorted "I can't make a meal out of those teeny-weeny hotdogs she serves "

"Shucks," Old Sam told them, "when I was a boy, all we could afford was hot dogs and hamburgers Everybody eats high on the hog these days At least they eat expensive Somehow it don't taste the same "

Phoebe said, "Well, we'll be eating a little lower on the hog for a while I'll have to start doing some of my own baking "

"I wouldn't advise you to sell your Mutual Funds now, Mrs Perriwinkle," Norman Foxbeater said seriously "It's a bad market I'd counsel you to hang on until things bottom out and start upward "

"Well, I'm sure I ought to, Mr Foxbeater," June Perriwinkle said, "but if the truth be known, I need the money You see, when I first opened out in the Sentinel Park suburbs, it went, oh, fabulously You can't imagine. But now, "

He nodded "A good many small establishments have a hard time The first businesses to suffer are the gift shops, the antique shops, the tiny shops that sell Christmas birthday and get-well cards that sort of thing Just what is your business, Mrs Perriwinkle?"

"Why, I have a little restaurant Oh, I assure you, only six months ago we were," she fluttered a laugh "just packing 'em in, as we say in the trade."

She handed him a card "You and Mrs Foxbeater must drop by some day We're never packed any more It's the *Lovely Dovee Wee Hottee Doggee Shoppee*."

Mr Foxbeater suppressed a slight start "I still think you ought to hang onto your Mutual Funds," he told her "Investing more money in a venture such as this in these times, is, uh "

"Well, *really*! If the truth be known, I know a bit more about the restaurant business than you might Mr Foxbeater I've been cooking in my own kitchen all my life."

After she had gone, Norman Foxbeater gazed unseeingly into a corner of his office for a long time Eventually, he sighed and flicked a switch on the office intercom

He said, "Mortimer, are you occupied?"

The box answered and he got up and went into his partner's office

Mortimer Foder looked up at his entrance "Sit down, Norman You look none too jubilant."

Foxbeater came directly to the point "Mortimer, I am of the opinion we ought to liquidate."

"Liquidate!"

The younger man nodded "Get our holdings into gold in Switzerland."

Mortimer Foder stared at him.

Foxbeater said doggedly "It is not something you can exactly put your finger upon It is a dozen things Sometimes I prefer to operate on intuition."

The elderly broker and investment counselor nodded heavily and

said, "Very true. However, so-called intuition is usually backed by a few hard facts."

His partner shook his head. "Not very hard. I am afraid, in this case. I was talking to Frank Wesley the other day. You know that development he had planned over near Vandenberg Village? Well, he has given it up. Had some houses he had orders for—well, one or two, at least—cancelled. The big one he was doing for Bill Waters of the Buick agency, for example. At any rate, he has cancelled the whole project."

Mortimer Foder frowned at him. "Why did Waters give up the house? He seemed quite upbeat about it when I saw him at the Browning party."

The younger man nodded. "That's part of what I mean. I assume the air-cushion car isn't going quite so well this year." He hesitated. "Have you noticed how many of the little shops around town are up for rent or sale?"

Foder's lips moved in and out. He said finally, "Liquidate all our holdings and convert to gold in Switzerland, eh? Afraid of inflation?"

"More, a heavy drop in the market, then possible deflation of the gold content of the dollar. When it is over, we will buy back in, of course. Make a killing. I see signs it has already begun. A number of the smaller investors are selling out. They need the money to support their own little endeavors, or, some of them, for daily expenses. There is a bit of unemployment about town."

His senior partner was scowling. "But you know, Norman, I was planning to retire. Turn everything over to you and young Bryant."

Foxbeater shrugged. He said slowly, "You could still do that of course, Mortimer. I'm sure I could handle it."

The other shook his heavy head. "No. Too much of an undertaking. Needs careful supervision. Let me think about it."

Norman Foxbeater slowly came to his feet. "I would suggest a quick decision, Mortimer. You can't be late in this game. When the bottom falls out, it can fall out overnight. There'll be many left holding the bag. And it is their securities we will be buying up for peanuts when the smoke clears."

"If it clears, this time," the old man grumbled.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing." Mortimer Foder said. "I'll talk it over with you and Bryant a bit later, Norman."

"Fine, Mortimer," Foxbeater said.

After the younger partner had left, Mortimer Foder sat for a full hour before finally sighing down to his insteps and reaching out to activate his communicator. He said to the girl who answered, "Miss Ballentine, get me the Seaforth Shipbuilders in Wilmington, California."

A few minutes later, he was saying into his phone screen, "I realize that and am willing to pay whatever penalties will accrue. However, I must definitely cancel the yacht's construction."

Half an hour later, in Wilmington, Peter Fielding was saying to his foreman, "I can't help it, Mike. That's the way the wind blows. We're going to have to shut down all three ways. If we're losing the building of the Foder yacht, I don't want to take a chance on doing the other on spec."

Mike said unhappily, "How about the small job for the movie guy?"

"It's not important enough to keep the yard open. We'll shop it out to Gonzalez and Martinez."

"Oh, great," Mike said. "And I was considering buying myself a house. The old lady's tired of living in a two-by-four apartment. I'll have to tell that real estate agent it's no go."

"Sorry, Mike," Fielding said. "It'll be hard on us all, until we get some new orders. I was getting myself a four-place Piper Mini-Jet. Figured on flying down to Ensenada on weekends for fishing. I'll have to cancel. The Piper representative isn't going to like that, he's already ordered the plane."

The President said, "Cramineritly, Scott, send in Weigand Dennis, will you?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. President."

The secretary left and shortly afterward the President's press chief entered, deceptively lazy in appearance and attire, as always. A corncob pipe, his trademark in news circles, hung from the side of his mouth.

"What is it, Chief?" he said.

"Sit down," the President said, and, even before the other had lowered himself into one of the heavy leather chairs, "You find time, easier than I, to keep your ear to the ground. What in the name

of Moses is happening in Cleveland? In fact what's happening everywhere?"

"Why particularly Cleveland?" Dennis said cautiously

The President waved a report "We just got this hurry-up call asking for financial assistance to keep their soup kitchens going What's a soup kitchen?"

Weigand Dennis reached for his tobacco pouch even as he said "Actually, not a very good term, under the circumstances It goes back in time What's happened in Cleveland is that they have this emergency food program Those in distress can request free meals from the city."

"Is it that bad in Cleveland?"

"I'm afraid it is, Mr President And this project is just too much for them You see, they tied it in with another program to come to the relief of some of the delivery services trucking concerns and so forth that were having a bad time So instead of having to stand in line at the soup kitchens, the food is delivered to each home"

"Well, what's the crisis?"

Weigand Dennis was packing his pipe "Evidently, those on relief rebelled against the diet Everybody's weight conscious these days They lit into city hall demanding a low-carbohydrate, high-protein diet You know, steak, asparagus, artichokes, avocados, that sort of thing An election was coming up, so the City Fathers capitulated"

For the moment the President was in his own field of understanding He said, "Well, that makes sense"

Dennis shrugged, searching for matches in several pockets "Yes, sir But the city treasury was already low all taxes and other city income being down Consequently, they're calling on the Federal government for aid."

"Craminently!" the President snapped "Don't they realize how much money we're going through as it is? Don't they realize we're liberating Mozambique, containing Finland and conducting a police action in the Antarctic?"

He picked up another report and waved it at the press man "That's not all That's not all by a damned sight What's going on in Denver? They want money, too."

"They ran out of local relief funds and the unemployed drove on city hall."

"Drove on city hall?" the President scowled

"Yes sir In the old days people with a beef used to march on city hall, carrying banners and so forth These days they drive "

"Oh " The President remained silent for a while, his face working as though in hard thought

Which surprised Weigand Dennis Presidents were not expected to be particularly bright anymore This one had possibly the best public image, the most appealing Tri-Di personality of all time, besides being photogenic and having an eidetic memory for the name of every person with whom he had ever shaken hands

"Son," he said finally, "what in the name of Moses is going on in this country?"

Weigand Dennis had got his pipe going, he exhaled the smoke from his mouth and said, "Mr President, it's a depression "

"A depression?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is a depression?"

Dennis cocked the stem of his pipe against his teeth "Well, sir, it's been a long time I've been reading up on the matter the past few days Checking it out In the early days they'd call one a Panic or a Bust, but after a time they must've realized it didn't help get out of them by using that sort of terminology, so they switched to Depression Even that had too negative a connotation, so after the big one, 1929 to 1939, they called them Recessions Finally some brain came up with Readjustment or Rolling Readjustment But we haven't had a real blockbuster since 1939 Before our time, of course "

"But what is it?" In sudden irritation the Chief Executive added, "What do you burn in that confounded thing, soft coal?"

Dennis slipped the pipe apologetically into a side pocket "Well, sir, do you know the term geometric progression?"

The President had been involved in campus politics at the time mathematics were being handed down, but he made a point of never admitting ignorance about anything

Weigand Dennis understood the expression on his face from of old He said, "A geometric progression is when you go two four-sixteen uh, sixteen times sixteen would be, uh, two hundred fifty-six And so forth."

His ultimate superior was looking at him blankly

Dennis shifted in his chair. "Well, sir, a depression is the opposite of that."

The other was still blank.

Weigand Dennis said desperately. "Sir, take Los Angeles. It starts as a small city. Some people come out to retire, liking the weather. They have houses built. The contractors haven't enough construction workers to do the building so they offer premium wages and attract employees from back East. These like the looks of L. A. and decide to remain, which involves building more houses and apartment houses, and stores to supply their needs. This all calls for more materials, cement plants, brickworks. It calls for more gasoline stations, more newspapers. More everything. A boom is on. More people arrive to get in on it. Money flows. Bars go up, nightclubs, nice restaurants. Boom begets boom. People making lots of money want luxuries. Car dealers go into business, swank hotels go up to house the businessmen coming to town.

"Little people get into the act, too. They've twenty thousand dollars or so to invest in a small business. Largely they go into things they don't know anything about. A retired restaurateur starts a chicken farm. A retired farmer opens up a little restaurant specializing in Chinese food, he's a Swede. While they're building their restaurants, or chicken farms, or drive-in Tri-Di theaters, or whatever, they spark the boom still more."

The President said, "Yes, yes."

Weigand Dennis fished his pipe from his pocket unconsciously and then pointed the stem at his superior. "Well, Mr. President, you can probably see it coming. The bust. The depression. Some of these little businesses fold. The empty buildings are up for lease. The construction workers go on unemployment insurance and cut back in their buying. They stop patronizing restaurants, beer joints and Tri-Di theaters. So a lot of these places fold or at least cut down staffs, causing more unemployment. People stop buying new cars. The local agencies cut back or fold. People start leaving town to go back to living on small farms where they can at least grow their own gardens. Meanwhile, Detroit cuts back car production, which means cutbacks in steel and all the other things that go into cars. Detroit lays off a hundred thousand employees or so, and steel lays off the same. The farmers begin getting

less call for their products and farm prices skid The farmers stop buying everything from kitchen appliances to Joy perfume "

"All right, all right I get the picture It pyramids backwards "

Dennis flinched at the term but said, "That's about it, Chief "

The President's face worked in thought again, to the fascination of his press officer.

Finally he said, "Why, this could be awful Craminently, it's interfering with my Far-Out Society, the most fabulous society of all history."

Weigand Dennis clicked the stem of his pipe against his teeth "Yes, sir, it'll do that And all our aid programs It's going to be difficult to keep shoveling all that money abroad "

The President said plaintively, "Well, how did they get rid of them in the past?"

Dennis had been afraid he was going to ask that one He said, "Well, that's a good question Roosevelt, who inherited the classic of all times, tried various things, most of which the Supreme Court kicked out Like the NRA, which was supposed to mean National Recovery Act, but which soon meant to most businessmen Never Roosevelt Again Then he figured on sending prices up by shooting pigs in the Middle West and pouring kerosene on potatoes up in Maine He put all the juvenile delinquents into the CCC where he paid them to range around in the woods supposedly planting trees and so forth It's debatable whether they trampled more than they planted Then he brought back beer."

"Brought back beer? Where'd it been?"

His press chief suppressed another wince "He'd inherited Prohibition But, of course, all that great experiment did was put the booze income into the pockets of the hoods, such as Al Capone The government needed the taxes so they brought back first beer and then liquor That, of course, threw a lot of honest bootleggers out of work and they started robbing banks and kidnapping the few remaining citizens who had any money."

The President stared at him "He sounds drivel-happy "

"Well, yes, sir At the time, a lot of people thought so But on the other hand, some thought him the greatest politician ever to come down the pike."

"Oh, they did eh?" The President went through his thought processes "I suppose there's a lot of political popularity to be won by a President who gets the nation out of a hole like this."

"Yes, sir I suppose there is Roosevelt was reelected three or four times."

"Three or four times? That's illegal!"

"Roosevelt was pretty popular He wowed them out in California by paying the farmers to chop down their fruit trees "

The President was wide-eyed "What did that accomplish?"

"Well, sir, it evidently made sense to Roosevelt and his brain trust They wanted to send the price of fruit up It seems as though there were some fifteen million unemployed and a lot of people hungry and "

The President held up a hand "Hold it Weigand, you've lost me already What was this about a brain trust?"

When Marv Sellers returned home after sitting around with the others at the union hall, he was surprised to find Phoebe there He looked at his watch, then remembered that it had stopped and that he hadn't wanted to spend the money for repairs

Phoebe made her mouth into a bitter moue "Fired " she said

"Fired, fer crissakes?"

She said, "The company's big item here in Tucson was distributing all these gadgets You know, nuclear back scratchers, electric toothbrushes, automatic martini stirrers that sort of thing Evidently, people finally got around to the fact that they could do without them So the company folded Even Mr Edwards has gone on relief "

"Oh, great," Marv groaned "Now we're both unemployed, and all our payments coming up "

Phoebe said, "Look, Marv, we can sell the car It's only a year and a half old and nearly paid for We'll get several thousand dollars for it "

"Oh, yeah? You oughta see the used cars on the lots Piles of them "

"We won't sell through a dealer, we'll put an ad in the paper "

He said, "What'll we do without a car? I need it to get to work if I get a job."

Old Sam had come in He chuckled almost happily, "Gettin' to be like old times " he said "I used to ride to work on a bike, when I was a kid. More fun than a car."

"Knock it, Gramps," Marv growled

Bill Waters flicked off his phone screen and turned to his secretary "Miss Harding."

"Yes, sir."

"That was old man Benington cancelling the only order we've had for over a month."

She looked distressed

Waters said "He bought a used car from some damn bricklayer who sold it for less than half price How can I compete with that sort of thing?"

"I don't know, Mr Waters I I heard the new models aren't going to have any chrome at all Bring down the price Possibly that will be an inducement."

"That's right," he grunted "Which has precipitated a crisis in the chrome industry They've laid off five thousand men "

He came to a sudden decision.

"Well, that's the straw that broke this ruptured camel's back Notify the men out in the shop that I'm closing "

She looked both distressed and sympathetic "The usual two weeks' severance pay, Mr. Waters?"

He laughed bitterly "Where do you think I'd get it, Miss Harding? My father-in-law's offered me a job as delivery boy for his delicatessen He's fired the two he used to have Wants to keep the job in the family "

The President was having another of his meetings with his brain trust Weigand Dennis sat immediately to his left and a bit behind him The professors, economists, sociologists and psychologists sat about in a circle, dimly reminiscent of King Arthur and his Round Table

The President had on his Tri-Di personality — to begin with He said brightly, "All right, Professor "

Weigand Dennis leaned forward and began to whisper, "Leland Markham, Harvard ," but the President muttered, "I know, I know I never forget the face of a potential voter "

Professor Markham shuffled his papers in full stereotype

He said, a hurt quality in his voice, "Our road-building program didn't exactly turn out the way we thought, Mr President "

The President scowled "Why not? It was a natural Put men to work all over the country building the roads, mining the needed material, asphalt, cement, everything "

The professor cleared his throat apologetically "Yes, sir It was all right as long as we were *building* the roads on a crash basis It is what happened afterwards we didn't anticipate" He cleared his throat again "The fact is, these newer, wider, faster straighter roads enabled the truck companies to move freight faster and hence with fewer men and trucks Since the roads are so straight and strong it enabled them to use larger trucks Now fewer drivers are needed, and since there are fewer trucks, less mechanics Besides that the competition has crowded out various railroads and resulted in the remaining ones cutting down their daily freight-car loadings The long-term result has been greater unemployment"

The President groaned softly

"I'll never end this confounded depression and get my Far-Out Society underway," he complained He turned to his next authority "Well, Doctor?"

The other expressed discomfort "I'm afraid my report has similarities to Professor Markham's."

The President turned off what remained of his Tri-Di personality and said coldly, "You were pretty happy about it as I recall"

"Well, yes, Mr President As a temporary make work project, building the dams employed tens of thousands of men, and even a good many women office workers'

"What could possibly go wrong?"

"Well, when the dams were completed they opened up wide areas of former desert to agriculture As you know given water, desert areas can prove fabulously fertile Also, these areas were so flat they particularly lent themselves to automated farming" The doctor shook his head mournfully "There's been a double result We're producing more surplus farm products than ever but at the same time the smaller farmers are being driven to the wall because they can't compete"

The President closed his eyes for a moment in pain

"Anything else?" he demanded before opening them again

"Well, yes Mr President There was another side effect The new dams, with the very latest hydroelectric generating equipment, have released so much additional power that several projected nuclear power plants in those areas have been cancelled At this stage, they couldn't compete with water power It has" he hesitated before

breaking the news—"led to the dismissal of several thousands of construction and nuclear power workers."

"Craminently," the President complained. He looked about his round table. "Does anybody have any *good* news?"

Somebody rustled papers and said meekly, "I have a report here that the Bull Durham Company is booming."

"Bull Durham?" the President said blankly.

Weigand Dennis leaned forward. "A roll-your-own cigarette company, Chief. The, ah, tailor-made cigarette companies aren't doing so good. Neither are the liquor companies and the breweries. With taxes so high, everybody's making bathtub gin and homebrew."

One cheerful-faced type chirped, "Well! Here's one from the plus side of the ledger. We've finally got every man jack of the military forces back home, and most of them out of uniform. It will cut literally billions from our expenditures and free the money for use to fight the depression."

A Yale economist moaned.

A secretary said, apologetically, "There's a side development to this, Mr. President."

Everybody looked at him. He said, unhappily, "The veterans. They're forming organizations. One is demanding free tickets on the airlines. First-class tickets, with meals. To march on Washington so they can demand a bonus."

A feisty, bearded type from across the table snapped, "There is one matter I think must come to your attention, Mr. President. When we raised tariffs so that foreign commodities wouldn't flood our few remaining domestic markets, we put Common Europe and the rest of the world into a tizzy. They raised tariffs right back at us, and our exports have fallen to the vanishing point."

"Well, then at least it balances off even," the President grumbled.

"Not exactly, Mr. President. You see, our economy depends upon the import of copper from Chile, oil and iron ore from Venezuela, tin from Bolivia, and so forth. As a result, we've been spending money abroad consistently, but not making any by exports. Our gold is flowing away from Fort Knox as though there were a leak in the vaults." The feisty one ventured a sour laugh.

Nobody joined him.

The President looked over his shoulder at Weigand Dennis and muttered, "So this is a brain trust."

Marv and Phoebe Sellers sat at the kitchen table of their house at 4011 Camino de Palmas, Tucson, Arizona.

Marv looked around at their packed belongings bitterly.

"Dave oughta be here with his truck pretty soon," he said. "You sure your folks don't mind us moving in with them?"

Phoebe shrugged resignation. "I suppose they mind, Marv. But what can they do? It's happening all around town. People moving in with each other, to save rent. How long do you think it'll take to sell the house?"

"I don't know, Phoebe. Houses aren't moving any too good."

"What do you think we'll get for it, Marv?"

"Not very much; we ain't got much equity into it. Payments for five or six years. Where's Old Sam?"

"He's in the next room, messing around in some of that old junk he had stored away in a trunk in the garage. What're we gonna do, Marv?"

He shrugged his depression. "I don't know, Phoebe. Just go on relief like everyone else, I guess. What else?"

"I heard the city was cutting back on relief. They run out of money. They ain't even paying the teachers any more."

Old Sam came in chortling.

"What've you got there, for crissakes, Gramps?" Marv said disinterestedly.

"You'll see," the oldster chuckled. He had a big piece of cardboard in one hand, a box of crayons in the other. He laid the cardboard out on the table, selected a crayon and began to color in a big black zero.

Marv, frowning, got up and looked over his shoulder. He read slowly, "*Unemployed. Please Buy an Apple. 50¢*"

Old Sam chortled again. "You young people never listen to me when I tell you about the old days. You'll see. I'll make us some pocket money."

Marv said accusingly, "That sign used to read 5¢. How come you're upping it to 50¢?"

"Inflation," Old Sam said cryptically. "Found this sign in the

bottom of my trunk Kind of forgot about it. You stand out on the street corner with a box of apples and this sign. Mint money."

"I'll bet, Gramps," Marv muttered

The President was slumped in his chair at his brain trust round table, after still another disastrous conference. The only ones left were his secretary, Scott, and Weigand Dennis

"Double-domes," he said in complaint. "Craminently. First one wants to cut back government expenditures by firing half the bureaucracy. That puts near onto ten more million people on unemployment. Another one wants to bring up prices, something like Roosevelt did, by plowing under cotton, that sort of thing. But they want to go him one better. This depression is *really* big This time, they want to pour petroleum back into the wells, and shovel coal back into the mines."

Scott and Dennis held their peace.

The President mumbled, "But that one from Princeton's right We've got to save money some way. Fort Knox is practically empty."

His face brightened "There's one thing Scott, relay orders to discontinue the space program Can't afford to be shooting all that crud up into the sky If they won't allow me to liberate Mozambique and contain Finland, I don't see how we can afford to colonize the moon "

"Yes, Mr President," Scott said. "The base on the moon How about the men in that?"

"How many of them are there?"

"Eight, altogether."

"How much will it cost to bring them back?"

Scott looked blank.

Weigand Dennis clicked his pipe stem against his teeth unhappily. "I'd estimate about a billion dollars, Chief."

"Leave them there. They're expendable," the President said grimly. "Raise a big monument to them It'll be cheaper I'll speak at the dedication. Very sentimental."

He scratched himself "This heavy underwear the Missus has me in sure itches. You'd think that cutting down on the burning of oil would be something unnecessary in the White House."

Weigand lit his pipe "Sets an example, sir," he said "Johnson used to turn out the lights."

The President looked at him balefully "What do you smoke in that thing, shredded army blanket?"

Weigand Dennis sighed and put the corncob away

The President snorted "What do you think about this reopening relationships with Cuba?"

"Well, it has its points sir Keeps the unemployed a bit more tranquil Back when times were booming, everybody was in a hurry and smoked cigarettes Now that everybody's sitting around watching Tr.-Di they've got time for a long smoke Some people are pretty serious about that slogan 'What this country needs is a good fifty-cent cigar'"

The President grunted "Talking about slogans, what do you think about that one proposed by Professor Markham to keep up morale" Prosperity Is Just Around the Corner"

Dennis said thoughtfully, "I think I've heard that somewhere before My instinct is to believe it won't be well received by the older generations."

The President glared at him "Confound it, Weigand, why don't *you* come up with something You're supposed to be my whiz-bang adviser"

Weigand Dennis stirred in his chair, automatically reached for his corncob, remembered and put it back "To tell the truth, Mr President, I think I have the germ of an idea"

'Well, in the name of Moses, what is it? I've been listening to drivel for the past four hours, a little more can't hurt"

Dennis nodded and absently reached for pipe and tobacco pouch still once again

"Sir, remember when I was telling you how a depression got started? The slow start, and then the snowball effect Just like boom begets boom, bust begets bust?"

"How could I forget' It was the first time I ever heard of a depression."

"Yes, sir Well it occurred to me that *somewhere* this depression had to start Some single place in the country Some single action" He paused for effect.

The President was staring at him, a glimmering of hope far behind his eyes. "So?"

Dennis shrugged his lazy shrug again, and lit the corncob "So suppose we trace it down Suppose we get to this root of the evil This starting point."

The President still stared His voice was slightly hoarse

"Then what do we do?"

Weigand Dennis replaced the tobacco pouch in his right jerkin pocket, the matches in his left He blew smoke from his nostrils

"We play it by ear," he said.

Weigand Dennis took in the long rows of computers, the clacking sorters and tabulators, the collators and keypunches

He shook his head and said,"Let's get out of this noise "

The other led him to an office. The door that closed behind them was soundproofed.

"Holy Smoke," Dennis said, "how do you do any thinking in that?"

"We don't have to do any thinking," Rod Watson told him "The machines do the thinking."

Weigand Dennis looked at him, even while fumbling in his jerkin pocket for his pipe.

Watson said, "And after they've done their thinking, we bring the result into offices like this and think about what they thought about "

"Very funny," Dennis said "I'll tell the President how this department produces jollies "

Rod Watson blanched

Dennis said "O K , O K I won't really He's on a retrenchment binge these days Bring down expenses Let go some of the millions of governmental employees that've been pyramiding ever since Hoover He fired the Air Force yesterday "

"Fired the Air Force?" Watson said

"That's right He figures what do you need an Air Force for with all the missiles we've got? At any rate, how far did you get today?"

Rod Watson walked around to the other side of his desk sat down and selected a report "Detroit," he said "According to the computers, the beginning of the big crackup was when Detroit cut back production and laid off about a hundred thousand men That's when it really started snowballing."

Dennis was lighting his pipe He shook his head wearily

"No," he said. "You don't understand what I want from you, Watson. That wasn't when it started snowballing. By that time, the avalanche was well under way."

Watson was scowling at him.

Dennis pointed with his pipe stem at the second button on the other jerkin. "*Why* did Detroit cut back?"

Watson blinked. "Why? Why, isn't that obvious? The new model cars weren't selling."

"Why? Take it further back."

Rod Watson looked distressed. "See here, Mr. Dennis, the Bureau of Statistics isn't omniscient."

Weigand Dennis puffed gently on his corncob. "Then it better get that way. Don't forget the Air Force, Rod, old man."

Watson closed his eyes in anguish.

"Just what is it you want, Mr. Dennis?"

"Go further back." Weigand Dennis waved vaguely in the direction of the machine room. "Somewhere in all that accumulated data in there, you can find the *beginning* of it all. The first grain of sand that started down the mountainside, joggling other grains, then pebbles, then rocks, until finally the avalanche was on us."

Watson groaned.

Weigand Dennis, flanked by two cold-eyed Secret Service men, came up the cement walk, taking in from the side of his eyes the unkempt condition of the old house's lawn. It wasn't just the lawn. The house could have used a coat of paint—or two. One of the shutters was hanging from a single hinge. There was a newspaper stuffed in a broken window.

Dennis grunted. "Place looks better than most, these days."

The others said nothing.

He mounted the wooden steps, which creaked forbiddingly, and knocked at the front door, assuming, without trying, that the bell would be out of order.

An elderly woman peered out at them. She looked like every other elderly woman he had ever seen, all combined. She would have had no trouble getting an extra's job as an old lady, in any Tri-Di production Hollywood made. Had Hollywood been making any Tri-Di shows these days. Who could afford to advertise on Tri-Di anymore?

Weigand Dennis said politely "Is this where Marvin Sellers lives?"

She said immediately, "If you're bill collectors "

"We know, we know Mr Sellers couldn't pay if we were We're not "

"You can't get blood out of a turnip," she said

"A very apt phrase you've coined " he bowed gently

She turned and yelled over her shoulder, "Marv! You Marv!" and then disappeared

Marv came to the door and looked at them in suspicion

"Yeah?"

Weigand Dennis looked at the other for a long moment

"So you're the one who started all this " he murmured

"What?" Marv said suspiciously

Weigand Dennis said, 'Can I talk to you privately?"

"Well, I don't know Why? I guess so Come on in " He held the broken-screened door open "In here's the parlor "

Weigand Dennis and the two Secret Service men followed the bricklayer into the Victorian period living room

Marv Sellers said "Sit down, gents What's all this about?"

Weigand Dennis said tightly, "Boys, this talk has to be absolutely private "

Guns flowed into the hands of the two ultra-trained operatives One stationed himself at the window staring out, empty of eye The other stood at the door, opened the mildest of cracks so that he could see into the hall beyond

"Hey what the hell's going on?" Marv Sellers protested

The two Secret Service men ignored him

"Sit down, Mr Sellers," Dennis said soothingly, as he reached for his pipe "I'm a special representative from the President " He brought forth credentials handed them to the other, and then fumbled for his tobacco pouch.

"Special representative from the President? You mean of the United States?"

"That is correct, Mr Sellers " Dennis got his pipe going, then brought forth another sheaf of papers He checked through them, found what he wanted

"Mr Sellers, two years ago on Saturday May 12th, you phoned the Withers Appliances Shop and told them to come get a new

deepfreeze you had bought shortly before Mr Sellers, that action on your part precipitated the current economic slump."

Marv Sellers bug-eyed him. "Who, me?"

"That is correct." Dennis held up a hand. "Yes, yes, I know what you are thinking. That many people send back appliances, cars, every other commodity. And usually this is simply a part of the workings of the economy, part of the give and take of the everyday business scene. However, private enterprise, as a socio-economic system, is a sensitive mechanism. Evidently, ours had been running at a delicate balance. It was your individual unpremeditated act that unleashed tiny forces that became larger forces and still larger forces, finally leading to the utter collapse of our economy."

"Jesus." Marv Sellers said. "Me?" He thought about it, round-eyed. "Wow. I'm surprised the President didn't send the FBI after me."

Dennis said soothingly, "He couldn't have even had he wanted to, Mr Sellers. He let the FBI go last week as part of the government retrenchment. There are no longer any bank robbers, there's nothing left in the banks to rob, and the Communists are no longer desirous of taking over the country."

Marv spread his hands. "Well, all I can say is, I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do about it. Here I am, living with my wife's people. No job. Flat broke."

Weigand Dennis was nodding. "It's a top-secret, last ditch try. Back in Washington, we've dubbed it Project Sellers. We're up against the wall, Mr Sellers. Half of the Senate is already in favor of giving the country back to the Indians. But the tribes still remaining are eagey."

"Project Sellers?" Marv blurted.

"Correct." Weigand Dennis turned his eyes to the Secret Service man at the window. "Steve, let me have that envelope."

"Yes, sir." Steve took out a long envelope from his inner jerkin pocket, brought it over to Dennis and then returned to the window and his guard duties.

Dennis said, "Remember, this is top most security. Highest priority. Everything would immediately be ruined if it got out. It all must be spontaneous. Not even your wife must know, Mr Sellers." He handed over the envelope.

"Phoebe? I can't tell Phoebe?"

"Absolutely no one."

Marv Sellers hesitated but then, as though hypnotised by a snake, slowly opened the envelope.

And brought forth a thick sheaf of spanking new banknotes

"What's this?" he said.

"Obviously, money."

Sellers chuckled bitterly "U' S government money?"

Dennis said, "I know, I know However, there are still sixteen pounds of gold at Fort Knox This money has been issued based on that."

Sellers was round-eyeing him again

Dennis said hurriedly "And there'll be more when you've spent that The President is arranging from a loan from Monaco It seems that the present Prince of that country has a soft spot for America His mother was an American, or something "

"All right," Sellers said "I'm as patriotic as the next one What do I do?"

Phoebe and Marv Sellers and Old Sam moved back into the house on Camino de Palmas the following day It had never sold, anyway

Marv was admirably stubborn He had a government job He'd tell Phoebe and Old Sam nothing more than that

The same day, he phoned Barry Benington

"Mr Benington," he said "I've had a change of mind "

"Change of mind? What's that, what's that?" the old man wheezed

"That car I sold you You know, I liked that car I'd like to buy it back "

The old man turned sly "Why, I don't know about that, Mr Sellers I've rather taken to it myself "

Marv said cautiously, "I'd be willing to pay you five hundred more than you gave me for the old wreck "

"Five hundred' Well, I don't know I've had her polished up you know, spent a lot of money on that beautiful car "

"I'll make it a thousand," Marv said

"It's a deal!" the oldster wheezed quickly

That afternoon when Bill Waters came up on his bicycle to deliver some bologna and cheese to old man Benington, the other met him at the kitchen door

Benington wheezed "Bill, what's the price of one of them Buick Cayuses?"

Bill Waters looked at him "I thought you bought yourself a used car, Mr. Benington."

"Yeah, but I'm tired of it Sold it back I always did kinda hanker after one of those air-cushion cars Can you still get me one?"

Bill Waters felt a tremor He said trying to keep his voice even "Well I sort of closed up my place But come to think of it I guess I've still got the franchise I could certainly order one from the distributor in Denver."

"Now you do that for me, Bill I've got the cash money right here for a down payment."

Marv Sellers was saying to Jim Withers "Yep what we need is one of those new deepfreezes Phoebe wants one of them cerise models"

Withers was taken aback "You got the down payment Mr Sellers?"

"Thought I'd just pay cash."

"I can sure as heck order you one We don't have any in stock The shop's closed."

"That's all right I'll pay you now And look Jim The other day I was reading about a nuclear martini stirrer Has a little atomic pack in it, like Stir your martinis for twenty years before running down Now a gadget like that..."

Jim Withers said quickly "I know where I can order you one I'll get several of them You know, it's about time I opened up that shop of mine again."

"Sure is," Marv said

When Norman Foxbeater drove past the *Lovey Dovey Wee Hottee Doggee Shoppee* he was mildly surprised to find the place hadn't folded its doors In fact, it seemed to be having quite a play

Whatever brought him to enter, he couldn't say Possibly it was because it was so unusual to see even mild business

He sat in a booth and allowed the waitress to bring him a dish of very small wieners, a portion of baked beans and some potato salad The baked beans were fabulous He dimly remembered Mrs Perriwinkle bragging about her home cooking

He recognized a few of the faces Over there was a bricklayer who had once worked briefly for Foxbeater in the building of a backyard barbecue What was his name? Sellers or something And over there was Barry Benington, who'd once had an account with Foxbeater & Foder And on the other side of the room were Bill Waters and his wife When times had been better Bill had belonged to the country club Foxbeater nodded to him and received a cheerful wave in return

Hm-m-m Things were evidently looking up for Bill Waters

Mrs Perriwinkle came sailing by, all smiles, a dish of her tiny hot dogs in hand.

She recognized him and came to a halt

Foxbeater said, "You seem to be doing quite a business, Mrs Perriwinkle."

"Oh," she lied airily, "it's always like this If the truth be known, one of these days I'll be dropping by to put some of my earnings back into Mutual Funds." She swept on

He looked after her

An hour later he came into Mortimer Foder's office

"Mortimer," he said thoughtfully, "my instinct tells me it's time to pull that money out of Switzerland and invest in American securities "

His senior partner looked up at him "Oh? Well, good Get this all ironed out and I'll be able to retire I'll bet I can get a yacht built for a pittance these days."

"Hm-m-m," Foxbeater nodded "But don't put it off too long Get your order in while things are still slow "

They were seated around the kitchen table

Phoebe said, "Guess what? Mr Edwards wants me to come back to work They've got a whole batch of new gadgets they're going to market."

Marv said, "Oh? Such as what?"

"Oh, a whole lot of things When everybody was out of work a lot of these technicians and inventors and all didn't have anything else to do so they kind of puttered around in their cellar and garage workshops and laboratories and came up with just about everything Like the electric spoons There's a little stud on the side You can switch it all the way over from stirring your coffee to eating soup "

Marv said, "Well, I've got good news, too Heard from my old boss

He's going to be constructing a new factory Place where they'll be manufacturing air-cushion roller skates "

Old Sam groaned "Back to the rat race," he said "I knew it wouldn't last They ain't making them like they used to In the old days, a depression was good to last for nigh onta ten years "

"Knock it off, Gramps," Mary growled at him

The old boy came to his feet "I better put away that apple sign of mine for future reference I'll bet the next one will be a doozy "

"Yes, sir," Weigand Dennis said, with satisfaction "It worked "

The President was jubilant

He rubbed his hands together He chortled "Now we can get back to my Far-Out Society And we can get that police action down in the Antarctic going again Scott, get me Admiral Pennington on the phone We're going to take him out of mothballs And instruct the Octagon to discontinue melting down the Fifteenth Fleet "

"Yes, Mr. President," Scott said

The President added thoughtfully, "I wonder how those boys up on the moon are doing?"

This is one of those stories I had forgotten I ever wrote and had no copies of it in my files However, NESFA evidently has access to a library second only to that of Forry Ackerman and they dug it up out of the archives I suppose it's rather typical of the sort of yarn we used to write back in the '50s—a gentle story that tries for a snap ending

Compleated Angler

OLD MAN FREDERICKS BROUGHT his car down quietly, not more than fifty feet from where the bridge had once crossed the St Johns River It was a full hour before dawn and he assumed there would be no one about, but he peered to his right and left before allowing himself a soft chuckle.

The oldster began digging around in the equipment he had stuffed into the rear before sneaking from the house He hoped he had everything Some of it had been hidden away so well he'd like never to have found it.

He carried the boat down to the water's edge, pressed its assembly button and watched anxiously to see if the aged mechanism would work It worked all right, all right Real nervous, he told himself in the idiom of his youth.

He went back to the car for the kicker The squares had called them outboards in the old days he was reminded, but they were kickers to

the real sportsmen Dig this cool model though He'd had it made up a full year ago, unbeknownst to any of the family probably the only water craft in existence.

The kicker attached to the boat's stern, he returned to the car for his tackle and the lunch spheres he'd made up the night before He put these on the grass, and turned back to the car long enough to fiddle with its remote control studs He'd leave it he decided at a full twenty-thousand-foot altitude No use giving himself away by the nearby presence of his car He slipped the control panel in his hip pocket and watched the car rise slowly

He let the kicker push the boat through the hyacinths and the lily pads that lined the river bank and then, in the barely moving current, headed upstream He'd fish near Windy Bill's old island For one thing, he could anchor right behind it and give himself that much more cover from prying eyes Not that he expected anyone else to be on the river today Not even the usual kids They'd be gathered here and there at the various Bomb Day services

Bomb Day, he snorted inwardly He'd seen enough Bomb Day services to last a dozen lifetimes even lifetimes as long as his

The river was as he had remembered it, now that the first faint flush of dawn was revealing the cypress, knee-deep at the water's edge the live oak, prisoners in their manacles of Spanish moss the palms heads held proudly high Could he hear a squirrel crashing its excited way through palm fronds? Not very likely but it could be possible It'd been a long time since he'd heard a squirrel barking

He had almost a mile before he reached Windy Bill's island but he couldn't wait any longer As the boat whispered easily along, he dug into his bait box and brought forth a shiner minnow He examined it with pride Not only did it look like a real shiner, but it felt, smelled and actually tasted like a shiner As he attached it to his line he wondered how long it had been since a real shiner had actually inhabited this stretch

His kicker was the ultimate in silence, but he decided to let his bait trail far astern and set his power reel for a quarter mile He cast, prideful of the fact that his wrist still held the old skill and watched the bait disappear into the darkish river mist behind In the old days,

trolling that far behind a boat would have been impractical, your line would have become snagged in grass or hyacinths. Eliminating the line had been a definite advantage.

Or had it? He remembered the various advances that had been made in angling since his youth. Outboard motors of ever increasing power to get you to the best beds more quickly, spin reels, to enable you to cast further, bait lures that became impossible for a fish to resist, then power reels, remote control plugs, and on and on.

The question was: if they had stuck to the old methods, forsaken the ultra modern devices, would fishing still be today what it had once been? He decided not. It hadn't been just the super-efficient equipment. The whole trend of world development had presaged an end of first hunting, then, in its turn, fishing. Along with the fantastic growth in population and the need for converting the former wilds into population centers and to the cultivation of more practical foods than fish and meat, had been the slow change in man's outlook in regard to other life.

Old Man Fredericks snorted his disgust. Why, when he was a boy, only Hindus and vegetarians held the opinions the whole world subscribed to now. Bunch of confounded do-gooders! That was what they had called them in the old days: do-gooders. There was a sneering connotation to the term; he couldn't remember the original reason for it, but it was there.

Was that a slight tug on his bait, echoed back to him through the reel's sonar? No, must be his imagination. The miniature TV screen built into the handle showed no sign of a predatory fish.

"Do-gooders," he snorted aloud. He'd like to see how all this regard for other life would stand up if a mosquito landed on one of them. Yes, sir. If we only still had mosquitos, or ticks, or even chiggers, we'd see how long they loved all life. But they'd eliminated them along with the housefly and the cockroach and every other pest, long before humanity decided that it loved all living things.

He reached his destination behind the island, found the exact spot he wanted and flipped the anchor toggle, rooting his boat in place so that a hurricane wouldn't have budged it.

Old Man Fredericks brought his bait in slowly, watching the TV screen with care but without avail. He shrugged. With any real

fisherman, it was the fishing that counted, not the quantity of fish caught. In the old days he'd spent many a day within feet of this very spot, without a single run. Not a bit. Not a sign of a bass.

He shifted in his pneumatic chair. Confound it, though, he would like to get one today. To make the day really complete, he'd certainly like to catch one.

If he caught one, he'd take it home, scale it, gut it, and no matter what Margaret said, he'd cook it up. Fillets would be the thing. Nobody else'd want any anyway. He might as well fillet it, dip it in egg—confound it, where would he be able to locate an egg?—then in cracker crumbs, and fry it in butter. He made a face. It'd have to be soybean butter.

He cast the shiner out again, over toward the east bank, brought it in slowly. He cast it out to the south, let it wander around a bit at random. You never knew with a bass. Maybe they'd be up against the bank, under the hyacinths, maybe in the channel.

He sank back into his seat and relaxed. For five years he'd been planning this excursion, and he was going to drain every minute of its pleasure.

It was fully light now, and he realized his chances of discovery had multiplied. Confound it, the hour just at dawn was the best of the day, and he hadn't had a strike, not to speak of a run.

Old Man Fredericks thought back over the years and remembered tobacco and wished that he had a smoke now. A cigar. Even better, a pipe to be smoked slowly, easily and with relaxed enjoyment. It was a sad day, he growled inwardly, when the World Congress had decided that the acreage devoted to tobacco cultivation could no longer be afforded. Let's see. Must have been a full seventy-five years ago. Was a bit of bootlegging for a time, but it must have been at least sixty years since he'd tasted tobacco at all. He tried to remember the soothing satisfaction of the weed, and pretended that he could.

He cast again and let the shiner drift with the current several hundred yards below the boat. Fish weren't biting today. Not that he cared, of course. It was the opportunity to *fish* that counted, not his catching anything. He had to keep reminding himself of that.

One thing was certain. He didn't know how long it would be before

they located him, but when they did! One thing was pretty certain, he'd never have the chance to fish again

The sun climbed as it had always climbed

Old Man Fredericks shifted anxiously and peered down the river No sign of them yet No sign of anybody at all. He grunted in deprecation Bomb Day services A whole world was in mourning Well, he'd fooled them this time This time the last remaining veteran of Bomb Day just wasn't at the services

He chuckled aloud The last veteran of Bomb Day was off fishing instead of having his hand shook by speech-making officials as TV cameras ground away at him Yes, sir, he was off fishing

The bass hit like an explosion.

His thoughts had been off the bait, and on speeches, toasts, and marching It took him a full half minute to realize that his shiner had been struck, taken, and was now being hauled unceremoniously downstream.

He grunted an old man's excitement and peered anxiously into the TV mirror Black as black Crazy, man, real crazy! The bass already had the fish inside him.

Let him run Let him run at least a hundred yards before setting the hook!

Old Man Fredericks got to his feet holding his rod in shaking hands Easy now, easy now! Don't get excited! Confound it, let him run!

The bass began to slow and the sonar indicator slacked off Old Man Fredericks took a deep breath, and socked him, and socked him again. Sink that hook!

There!

The bass broke It threw itself into the air a hundred yards or more from the old man's boat, thrashed its tail wildly, sank back again

Old Man Fredericks set the tension at eight pounds, needing all his will power to refrain from using a full twenty test and horsing the bass in safely.

The fish ran then, and the hum of the reel was music Slowly the old man applied pressure, began to take in slack The bass ran again Ran

and broke Ran and broke It was a fish! You had to admit that It was a fighting fish!

Fifty feet from the boat, the bass made its last bid It lunged its full length into the air.

"Dig that crazy bass," the old man gloated "Must go fifteen pounds."

He brought him in slowly, the fight rapidly going out of the beaten fish When it was finally at the edge of the boat, Old Man Fredericks bent quickly, inserted his finger and thumb between gills and mouth and hauled him in.

It wouldn't go fifteen pounds but it was a good twelve, he decided Good even for the St Johns of the old days before the war

The oldster realized now that he was tired, more so than his doctor allowed He decided that it was unlikely he'd have any further luck anyway, flicked the anchor toggle, started up the kicker, and headed downstream for the point at which he'd embarked

They were waiting for him there Two of the park's attendants Nice, upright boys who helped preserve this lone spot of Earth as it once had been A full square mile of natural forest, of natural river preserved so that youth everywhere would make pilgrimages to the world of yesteryear

The taller attendant helped him beach the boat "Hello, Mr Fredericks," he said, without inflection

Old Man Fredericks decided against a sheepish facial expression, and said defiantly, "I don't care what you say "

The shorter attendant helped him from the boat, and the old man was surprised to feel how stiff a few hours on the river had made him He carried the bass out with him

"Nice fish," the taller one said, noncommittally

"You're darn right it's a nice fish," Old Man Fredericks said "First time I been fishing in fifty years, but an old-timer like me knows how to get them."

"Ummm," the shorter one said

"Going to take him home and fry him," Old Man Fredericks snapped.

The taller one nodded "That'll be the first time that's been done in a quarter century ever since it was decided that the ocean be devoted to farming and that the fish had to go "

Old Man Fredericks said, "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing, Mr Fredericks," the shorter one said "Listen, Mr Fredericks, I hate to bother you, but my boy he probably missed seeing you on TV at the Bomb Day services Would you mind?" He held out a stylus and pad.

"Autograph, eh?" Old Man Fredericks grunted sourly "Afraid I won't last until next Bomb Day?" He took the stylus and scratched his name hurriedly.

He took the control panel from his pocket and threw the switch to activate the return of his car, then began to gather his equipment The park attendants helped him reassemble the collapsible boat in silence

The car swooped down and he loaded it

"I'll still be here next year, all right," he said in the way of a parting shot, "and you boys better look alive, or maybe I'll be ducking all those confounded services again and coming back to fish "

His car took off and was a speck in a matter of moments

The shorter attendant sighed "He might just possibly come back, but he'll never catch another fish Black Tom there was the very last game fish in the world."

The taller one looked after the speck "I heard there were some trout over in a park in Scotland."

"In glass bowls," the other snorted "Not living in the wild state Black Tom was the last."

"Well then, that's that," the taller attendant said "The last fisherman in the world has caught the last fish "

"I hope no one ever tells him."

"Yeah It'd be a shame if he ever found out that all during his fishing trip most of the TV sets on Earth were trained on him The last fisherman catching the last fish and all the rest of us enjoying every minute of it...."

This is probably the most controversial story I've ever published. It was written back in the early days of the Vietnam catastrophe and before the thousands of young Americans were making their exodus to Canada. I've sometimes wondered if this story affected any of them. And I sometimes wonder if any of the magazines would publish it today.

Pacifist

IT WAS ANOTHER TIME, another space, another continuum.

Warren Casey called, "Boy! You're Fredric McGivern, aren't you?"

The lad stopped and frowned in puzzlement. "Well, yes, sir." He was a youngster of about nine. A bit plump, particularly about the face.

Warren Casey said, "Come along, son. I've been sent to pick you up."

The boy saw a man in his mid-thirties, a certain dynamic quality behind the facial weariness. He wore a uniform with which young McGivern was not familiar, but which looked reassuring.

"Me, sir?" the boy said. "You've been sent to pick me up?"

"That's right, son. Get into the car and I'll tell you all about it."

"But my father said. . ."

"Your father *sent* me, son. Senator McGivern. Now, come along or he'll be angry."

"Are you sure?" Still frowning Fredric McGivern climbed into the helio-car In seconds it had bounded into the second level and then the first, to speed off to the southwest

It was more than an hour before the kidnapping was discovered

Warren Casey swooped in, dropped two levels precipitately and brought the helio-car down in so dainty a landing that there was no perceptible touch of air cushion to garage top

He fingered a switch with his left hand even as he brought his right out of his jacket holding a badly burned out pipe While the garage's elevator sank into the recess below, he was loading the aged briar from an equally ancient pouch

In the garage, Mary Baca was waiting nervously She said, even though she must have been able to see the boy "You got him?"

"That's right " Casey said "I've given him a shot He'll be out for another half hour or so Take over, will you Mary?"

The nurse looked down at the crumpled figure bitterly "It couldn't have been his father We have to pick on a child "

Casey flicked a quick glance at her as he lit the pipe "It's all been worked out, Mary."

"Of course," she said Her voice tightened "I'll have him in the cell behind the rumpus room."

Down below he went to the room that had been assigned him and stripped from the uniform He went into the bath and showered thoroughly, washing out a full third of the hair that had been on his head and half the color in that which remained He emerged from the bath, little refreshed and some five years older

He dressed in an inexpensive suit not overly well pressed and showing wear His shirt was not clean, as though this was the second day he had worn it, and there was a food spot on his tie

At the small desk he picked up an automatic pencil and clipped it into the suit's breast pocket and stuffed a bulky notebook into a side pocket He stared down at the gun for a moment, then grimaced and left it He departed the house by the front door and made his way to the metro escalator.

The nearest metro exit was about a quarter of a mile from Senator McGivern's residence and Warren Casey walked the distance By the time he arrived he had achieved a cynical quality in his expression of

boredom He didn't bother to look up into the face of whoever opened the door

"Jakes," he said "H N S McGivern expects me"

"H N S?" the butler said stiffly

"Hemisphere News Hemisphere News Service," Warren Casey yawned. "For crissakes, we gonna stand here all day? I gotta deadline"

"Well, step in here, sir. I'll check" The other turned and led the way.

Casey stuck a finger into his back His voice went flat "Don't get excited and maybe you won't get hurt Just take me to the Senator, see? Don't do nothing at all might make me want to pull this trigger"

The butler's face was gray "The Senator is in his study I warn you . sir the police shall know of this immediately"

"Sure, sure, Mac Now just let's go to the study"

"It's right in there.. sir"

"Fine," Casey said "And what's that, under the stairway?"

"Why, that's the broom closet The downstairs maid's broom "

Casey brought his flat hand around in a quick clip The servant folded up with a lung-emptying sigh and Casey caught him before he hit the floor, dragged him to the broom closet, pushed and wedged him inside He darted a hand to a vest pocket and brought forth a syrette. "That'll keep you out for a couple of hours," he muttered, closing the closet door.

He went over to the heavy door which the butler had indicated as Senator McGivern's study, and knocked on it In a moment it opened and a husky in his mid-twenties, nattily attired and of obvious self-importance, frowned at him

"Yes?" he said.

"Steve Jakes of Hemisphere News," Warren Casey said "The editor sent me over " As he talked, he sidestepped the other and emerged into the room beyond.

Behind the desk was an older edition of nine-year-old Fredric McGivern A Fredric McGivern at the age of perhaps fifty, with what had been boyish plump cheeks now gone to heavy jowls

"What's this?" he growled.

Casey stepped further into the room "Jakes, Senator My editor..."

Senator Phil McGivern's abilities included cunning and a high

survival factor He lumbered to his feet "Walters! Take him!" he snapped "He's a fake!" He bent over to snatch at a desk drawer

Walters was moving, but far too slowly

Warren Casey met him halfway reached forward with both hands and grasped the fabric of the foppish drape suit the secretary wore Casey stuck out a hip, twisted quickly turning his back halfway to the other He came over and around, throwing the younger man heavily to his back

Casey didn't bother to look down He stuck a hand into a side pocket, pointed a finger at McGivern through the cloth

The other's normally ruddy face drained of color He fell back into his chair

Warren Casey walked around the desk and brought the gun the other had been fumbling for from the drawer He allowed himself a deprecating snort before dropping it carelessly into a pocket

Senator Phil McGivern was no coward He glowered at Warren Casey "You've broken into my home criminal," he said "You've assaulted my secretary and threatened me with a deadly weapon You will be fortunate to be awarded no more than twenty years"

Casey sank into an easy chair so situated that he could watch both McGivern and his now unconscious assistant at the same time He said flatly, "I represent the Pacifists Senator Approximately an hour ago your son was kidnapped You're one of our top-priority persons You probably realize the implications"

"Fredric! You'd kill a nine-year-old boy!"

Casey's voice was flat "I have killed many nine-year-old boys, Senator."

"Are you a monster?"

"I was a bomber pilot, Senator."

The other who had half risen again, slumped back into his chair "But that's different."

"I do not find it so."

In his hard career, Phil McGivern had faced many emergencies He drew himself up now "What do you want criminal? I warn you, I am not a merciful man You'll pay for this, Mr "

"Keep calling me Jakes, if you wish," Casey said mildly "I'm not important Just one member of a widespread organization"

"What do you want?" the Senator snapped

"How much do you know about the Pacifists, McGivern?"

"I know them to be a band of vicious criminals!"

Casey nodded, agreeably "It's according to whose laws you go by We have rejected yours."

"What do you want?" the Senator repeated

"Of necessity," Casey continued, evenly, "our organization is a secret one, however, it contains some of the world's best brains, in almost every field of endeavor, even including elements in the governments of both Hemispheres "

Phil McGivern snorted his contempt

Casey went on, an eye taking in the fact that Walters, laid out on the floor had stirred and groaned softly "Among our number are some capable of charting world developments By extrapolation, they have concluded that if your policies are continued nuclear war will break out within three years."

The other flushed in anger, finding trouble in controlling his voice "Spies! Subversives! Make no mistake about it, Jakes, as you call yourself, we realize you're nothing more than catspaws for the Polarians."

The self-named Pacifist chuckled sourly "You should know better, Senator. Our organization is as active in the Northern Hemisphere as it is in this one " Suddenly he came quickly to his feet and bent over Walters who had begun to stir Casey's hand flicked out and chipped the other across the jawbone The secretary collapsed again without sound

Warren Casey returned to his chair "The point is that our experts are of the opinion that you'll have to drop out of politics Senator McGivern I suggest a resignation for reasons of health within the next week."

There was quick rage, then steaming silence while thought processes went on "And Fredric?" McGivern growled finally

Casey shrugged "He will be freed as soon as you comply "

The other's eyes narrowed "How do you know I'll stick to my promise? A contract made under duress has no validity "

Casey said impatiently, "Having Fredric in our hands now is a minor matter, an immediate bargaining point to emphasize our position Senator, we have investigated you thoroughly You have a wife of whom you are moderately fond, and a mistress whom you

love. You have three adult children by your first wife, and four grandchildren. You have two children by your second wife, Fredric and Janie. You have a living uncle and two aunts and five first cousins. Being a politician, you have many surface friends whom we shall largely ignore, but you also know some thirty persons who mean much to you."

McGivern was beginning to adjust to this abnormal conversation. He growled, "What's all this got to do with it?"

Warren Casey looked into the other's eyes. "We shall kill them, one by one. Shot at a distance with a rifle with telescopic sights. Blown up by bomb. Machine-gunned, possibly as they walk down the front steps of their homes."

"You're insane! The police. The . . ."

Casey went on, ignoring the interruption. "We are in no hurry. Some of your children, your relatives, your friends, your mistress may take to hiding in their panic. But there is no hiding. . . nowhere on all this world. Our organization is in no hurry, and we are rich in resources. Perhaps, in the doing, some of us will be captured or dispatched. It's beside the point. We are dedicated. That's all we'll be living for, killing the people whom you love. When they are all gone, we will kill *you*. Believe me, by that time it will be as though we're motivated by compassion. All your friends, your loved ones, your near-of-kin will be gone.

"We will kill, kill, kill . . . but in all it will be less than a hundred people. It will not be thousands and millions of people. It will only be *your* closest friends, *your* relatives, *your* children and finally *you*. At the end, Senator, you will have some idea of the meaning of war."

By the end of this, although it was delivered in an almost emotionless voice, Phil McGivern was pushed back in his swivel chair as though from physical attack. He repeated, hoarsely, "You're insane."

Warren Casey shook his head. "No, it is really you, you and those like you, who are insane. Wrapped up in your positions of power, in your greed for wealth, in the preservation of your privileges, you would bring us into a conflagration which would destroy us all. You are the ones who are insane."

The Pacifist agent leaned forward. "Throughout history, Senator, there have been pacifists. But never such pacifists as we. Always, in the

past, they have been laughed at or sneered at in times of peace, and imprisoned or worse in time of war."

"Cowards," Senator McGivern muttered in distaste.

Casey shook his head and chuckled. "Never, Senator. Don't look for cowards among pacifists and conscientious objectors. It takes courage to buck the current of public opinion. A coward is often better off in the ranks and usually safer. In modern war, at least until the advent of nuclear conflict, only a fraction of the soldiers ever see combat. The rest are in logistics, in a thousand branches of behind-the-lines work. One man in twenty ever glimpses the enemy."

McGivern snapped. "I'm not interested in your philosophy, criminal. Get to the point. I want my son back."

"This is the point, Senator. Today we Pacifists have become realists. We are willing to fight, to kill and to die in order to prevent war. We are not interested in the survival of individuals, we are of the opinion that another war will destroy the race, and to preserve humanity we will do literally anything."

McGivern thumped a heavy fist on his chair arm. "You *fool*! The Northern Hemisphere seeks domination of the whole world. We must defend ourselves!"

The Pacifist was shaking his head again. "We don't care who is right or wrong at either side is. It finally gets to the point where that is meaningless. Our colleagues are working among the Polarians, just as we are working here in the Southern Hemisphere. Persons such as yourself, on the other side, are courting death just as you are by taking steps that lead to war."

Warren Casey stood. "You have one week in which to resign your office, Senator. If you fail to, you will never see your son Fredric again. And then, one by one, you will hear of the deaths of your relatives and friends."

The Pacifist agent came quickly around the desk and the older man, in an effort to escape, pushed his chair backward and tried to come to his feet. He was too clumsy in his bulk. Warren Casey loomed over him, slipped a syrette into the other's neck.

Senator Phil McGivern, swearing, fell to his knees and then tried to come erect. He never made it. His eyes first stared, then glazed, and he dropped back to the floor, unconscious.

Warren Casey bent momentarily over Walters, the secretary, but

decided that he was safe for a time. He shot a quick look about the room. What had he touched? Had he left anything?

He strode quickly from the room, retracing the path by which the butler had brought him fifteen minutes earlier, and let himself out the front door.

His cab pulled up before the aged, but well-preserved, mansion and he dropped coins into the vehicle's tool box and then watched it slip away into the traffic.

He walked to the door and let himself be identified at the screen. When the door opened he strolled through.

A young woman, her face so very earnest in manner that her natural prettiness was all but destroyed, sat at a desk.

Rising, she led the way and held the door open for him and they both entered the conference room. There were three men there at the table, all of them masked.

Casey was at ease in their presence. He pulled a chair up across from them and sat down. The girl took her place at the table and prepared to take notes.

The chairman, who was flanked by the other two, said, "How did the McGivern affair go, Casey?"

"As planned. The boy proved no difficulty. He is now at the hideaway in the charge of Operative Mary Baca."

"And the Senator?"

"As expected. I gave him full warning."

"The secretary, Walters. He was eliminated?"

"Well, no. I left him unconscious."

There was a silence.

One of the masked men said, "The plan was to eliminate the secretary to give emphasis to the Senator as to our determination."

Casey's voice remained even. "As it worked out, it seemed expedient to follow through as I did."

The chairman said, "Very well. The field operative works with considerable range of discretion. No one can foresee what will develop once an operation is under way."

Warren Casey said nothing.

The second board member sighed. "But we had hoped that the sight

of a brutal killing, right before him, might have shocked Phil McGivern into submission immediately. As it is now, if our estimates of his character are correct the best we can hope for is capitulation after several of his intimates have been dispatched."

Casey said wearily, "He will never capitulate, no matter what we do. He's one of the bad ones."

The third board member, who had not spoken to this point, said thoughtfully, "Perhaps his immediate assassination would be best."

The chairman shook his head. "No. We've thrashed this all out. We want to use McGivern as an example. In the future, when dealing with similar cases, our people will be able to threaten others with his fate. We'll see it through, as planned." He looked at Casey. "We have another assignment for you."

Warren Casey leaned back in his chair, his face expressionless, aside from the perpetual weariness. "All right," he said.

The second board member took up an assignment sheet. "It's a Priority One. Some twenty operatives are involved in all." He cleared his voice. "You've had interceptor experience during your military career?"

Casey said, "A year, during the last war. I was shot down twice and they figured my timing was going, so they switched me to medium bombers."

"Our informations is that you have flown the Y-36G."

"That's right." Casey wondered what they were getting to.

The board officer said, "In two weeks the first class of the Space Academy graduates. Until now, warfare has been restricted to land, sea and air. With this graduation we will have the military erupting into a new medium."

"I've read about it," Casey said.

"The graduation will be spectacular. The class is small, only seventy-five cadets, but already the school is expanding. All the other services will be represented at the ceremony."

Warren Casey wished the other would get to the point.

"We want to make this a very dramatic protest against military preparedness," the other went on. "Something that will shock the whole nation, and certainly throw fear into everyone connected with arms."

The chairman took over. "The air force will put on a show. A flight of twenty Y-36G's will buzz the stand where the graduating cadets are seated, awaiting their commissions."

Realization was beginning to build within Casey.

"You'll be flying one of those Y-36G's," the chairman pursued. His next sentence came slowly. "And the guns of your craft will be the only ones in the flight that are loaded."

Warren Casey said, without emotion, "I'm expendable, I suppose?"

The chairman gestured in negation. "No. We have plans for your escape. You make only the one pass and you strafe the cadets as you do so. You then proceed due north at full speed—"

Casey interrupted quickly. "You'd better not tell me any more about it. I don't think I can take this assignment."

The chairman was obviously taken aback. "Why, Warren? You're one of our senior men and an experienced pilot."

Casey shook his head unhappily. "Personal reasons. No operative is forced to take an assignment he doesn't want. I'd rather skip this, so you'd best not tell me any more about it. That way it's impossible for me to crack under pressure and betray someone."

"Very well," the chairman said, his voice brisk. "Do you wish a vacation, a rest from further assignment at this time?"

"No. Just give me something else."

One of the other board members took up another piece of paper. "The matter of Professor Leonard LaVaux," he said.

Professor Leonard LaVaux lived in a small bungalow in a section of town which had never pretended to more than middle-class status. The lawn could have used a bit more care, and the roses more cutting back, but the place had an air of being comfortably lived in.

Warren Casey was in one of his favored disguises, that of a newspaperman. This time he bore a press camera, held by its strap. There was a gadget bag over one shoulder. He knocked, leaned on the door jamb, assumed a bored expression and waited.

Professor LaVaux seemed a classical example of stereotyping. Any producer would have hired him for a scholar's part on sight. He blinked at the pseudo-journalist through bifocals.

Casey said, "The *Star*, Professor. Editor sent me to get a few shots."

The professor was puzzled. "Photographs? But I don't know of any reason why I should be newsworthy at this time."

Casey said, "You know how it is. Your name gets in the news sometimes. We like to have something good right on hand to drop in. Editor wants a couple nice shots in your study. You know, like reading a book or something."

"I see," the professor said. "Well, well, of course. Reading a book, eh? What sort of book? Come in, young man."

"Any book will do," Casey said with journalistic cynicism. "It can be Little Red Riding Hood, far as I'm concerned."

"Yes, of course," the professor said. "Silly of me. The readers would hardly be able to see the title."

The professor's study was a man's room. Books upon books, but also a king-size pipe rack, a small portable bar, two or three really comfortable chairs and a couch suitable for sprawling upon without removal of shoes.

LaVaux took one of the chairs, waved the supposed photographer to another. "Now," he said. "What is the procedure?"

Casey looked about the room, considering. "You live here all alone?" he said, as though making conversation while planning his photography.

"A housekeeper," the professor said.

"Maybe we could work her in on a shot or two."

"I'm afraid she's out now."

Casey took the chair the other had offered. His voice changed tone. "Then we can come right to business," he said.

The professor's eyes flicked behind the bifocals. "I beg your pardon?"

Warren Casey said, "You've heard of the Pacifists, Professor?"

"Why... why, of course. An underground, illegal organization." The professor added, "Quite often accused of assassination and other heinous crime, although I've been inclined to think such reports exaggerated, of course."

"Well, don't," Casey said curtly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I'm a Pacifist operative Professor LaVaux, and I've been assigned to warn you to discontinue your present research or your life will be forfeit."

The other gasped, unable to adapt his mind to the shift in identity

Warren Casey said, "You're evidently not knowledgeable about our organization, Professor I'll brief you We exist for the purpose of preventing further armed conflict upon this planet To secure that end, we are willing to take any measures We are ruthless Professor My interest is not to convert you, but solely to warn you that unless your present research is ended you are a dead man "

The professor protested, "See here, I'm a scientist, not a politician My work is in pure research What engineers the military and eventually the government do with applications of my discoveries is not my concern."

"That's right," Casey nodded agreeably "Up to this point you, like many of your colleagues, have not concerned yourself with the eventual result of your research Beginning now, you do, Professor, or we will kill you You have one week to decide "

"The government will protect me'"

Casey shook his head "No, Professor Only for a time, even though they devote the efforts of a hundred security police Throughout history, a really devoted group, given sufficient numbers and resources, could always successfully assassinate any person, in time "

"That was the past," the professor said, unconvinced "Today, they can protect me."

Casey was still shaking his head "Let me show you just one tool of our trade " He took up his camera and removed the back "See this little device? It's a small, spring-powered gun which projects a tiny, tiny hypodermic needle through the supposed lens of this dummy camera So tiny is the dart that when it imbeds itself in your neck, hand or belly, you feel no more than a mosquito bite "

The professor was motivated more by curiosity than fear He bent forward to look at the device "Amazing," he said "And you have successfully used it?"

"Other operatives of our organization have There are few, politicians in particular, who can escape the news photographer This

camera is but one of our items of equipment, and with it an assassin has little trouble getting near his victim."

The professor shook his head in all but admiration. "Amazing," he repeated. "I shall never feel safe with a photographer again."

Warren Casey said, "You have no need for fear, Professor, if you abandon your current research."

Leonard LaVaux said, "And I have a week to decide? Very well, in a week's time I shall issue notice to the press either that I have given up my research, or that I have been threatened by the Pacifists and demand protection."

Casey began to stand, but the professor raised a hand. "Wait a moment," he said. "I'd like to ask you a few questions."

The pacifist looked at the other warily.

LaVaux said, "You're the first member of your organization to whom I've ever spoken."

"I doubt it," Casey said.

"Ah? Very secret, eh? Members are everywhere, but undetected. Then how do you recruit new membership? Being as illegal as you are, of course, the initial approach must be delicate indeed."

"That's right," Casey nodded. "We take every precaution. A prospect isn't approached until it is obvious he is actually seeking an answer to the problem of outlawing war. Many persons, Professor, come to our point of view on their own. They begin discussing the subject, seeking answers, seeking fellows who think along the same line."

The professor was fascinated. "But even then, of course, mistakes must be made and some of your membership unmasked to the authorities."

"A hazard always faced by an underground."

"And then," the professor said triumphantly, "your whole organization crumbles. One betrays the next, under police coercion."

Casey laughed sourly. "No. That's not it. We profit by those who have gone before. The history of underground organizations is a long one, Professor. Each unit of five pacifists know only those belonging to their own unit, and one coordinator. The coordinators, in turn, know only four other coordinators with whom they work, plus a

section leader, who knows only four other section leaders with whom *he* works, and so forth right to the top officials of the organization."

"I see," the professor murmured. "So an ordinary member can at most betray four others, of course. But when the police capture a coordinator?"

"Then twenty-five persons are endangered." Casey admitted. "And occasionally it happens. But we have tens of thousands of members, Professor, and new ones coming in daily. We grow slightly faster than they seem able to catch us."

The professor switched subjects. "Well, no one would accuse you of being a patriot, certainly."

Casey contradicted him. "It's a different type of patriotism. I don't identify myself with this Hemisphere."

The other's eyebrows went up. "I see. Then you are a Polarian?"

Casey shook his head. "Nor do I identify myself with them. Our patriotism is to the human race, Professor. This is no longer a matter of nation, religion or hemisphere. It is a matter of species survival. We are not interested in politics, socio-economic systems or ideology other than when they begin to lead to armed conflict between nations."

The professor considered him for a long silent period. Finally, he said, "Do you really think it will work?"

"How's that?" Warren Casey said. For some reason this earnest, fascinated, prying scientist appealed to him. He felt relaxed during the conversation, a relaxation, he realized, that had been denied him for long months now.

"Trying to keep the world at peace by threatening, frightening, even assassinating those who you decide are trending toward war. Do you think it will work?"

All the wariness was back suddenly. The months-long tiredness, and doubt, and the growing nausea brought on by violence, violence, violence. If only he could never hear the word *kill* again.

He said, "When I first joined the Pacifists, I was positive they had the only answer. Now I've taken my stand, but perhaps I am not so sure. Why do you think it won't?"

The scientist pointed a finger at him. "You make a basic mistake in thinking this a matter of individuals. To use an example, in effect what you are saying is, *kill the dictator and democracy will return to the*

country. Nonsense. You put the cart before the horse. That dictator didn't get into power because he was so fabulously capable that he was able to thwart a whole nation's desire for liberty. He, himself, is the product of a situation. Change the situation and he will disappear, but simply assassinate him and all you'll get is another dictator."

The other's words bothered Warren Casey. Not because they were new to him, subconsciously they'd been with him almost from the beginning. He looked at the scientist, waiting for him to go on.

LaVaux touched himself on the chest with his right forefinger. "Take me. I am doing work in a field that can be adapted to military use, although that is not my interest. Actually, I am contemptuous of the military. But you threaten my life if I continue. Very well. Suppose you coerce me and I drop my research. Do you think that will stop investigation by a hundred, a thousand other capable men? Of course not. My branch of science is on the verge of various breakthroughs. If I don't make them, someone else will. You don't stop an avalanche by arresting the roll of one rock."

A tic began in the cheek of Casey's usually emotionless face. "So you think...," he prompted.

LaVaux's eyes brightened behind the bifocals. He was a man of enthusiastic opinions. He said, "Individuals in the modern world do not start wars. It's more basic than that. If the world is going to achieve the ending of warfare, it's going to have to find the causes of international conflict and eliminate them." He chuckled. "Which, of course, opens up a whole new line of investigation."

Warren Casey stood up. He said, "Meanwhile, Professor, I represent an organization that, while possibly wrong, doesn't agree with you. The ultimatum has been served. You have one week."

Professor LaVaux saw him to the door.

"I'd like to discuss the subject further, some day," he said. "But, of course, I suppose I won't be seeing you again."

"That's right." Casey said. He twisted his mouth wryly. "If we have to deal with you further, Professor, and I hope we don't, somebody else will handle it." He looked at the other and momentarily considered rendering the stereotyped-looking scientist unconscious before he left. But he shook his head. *Lord*, he was tired of violence.

As he walked down the garden path to the gate, Professor LaVaux called, "By the way, your disguise. You'll find there are several

excellent oral drugs which will darken your complexion even more effectively than your present method."

Almost, Warren Casey had to laugh.

He was between assignments, which was a relief. He knew he was physically as well as mentally worn. He was going to have to take the board up on that offer of a prolonged vacation.

Taking the usual precautions in the way of avoiding possible pursuit, he returned to his own apartment. It had been a week, what with one assignment and another, and it was a pleasure to look forward to at least a matter of a few hours of complete relaxation.

He shed his clothing, showered and then dressed in comfortably old clothing. He went to the tiny kitchen and prepared a drink, finding no ice since he had unplugged the refrigerator before leaving.

Casey dropped into his reading chair and took up the paperback he'd been reading when summoned a week ago to duty. He had forgotten the subject. Ah, yes, a swashbuckling historical novel. He snorted inwardly. It was all so simple. All the hero had to do was kill the evil duke in a duel and everything would resolve itself.

He caught himself up. Professor LaVaux's conversation coming back to him. Essentially, that was what he—what the Pacifists were trying to do. By killing the equivalent of the evil duke - individuals, in other words - they were hoping to solve the problems of the world. Nonsense, on the face of it.

He put down the novel and stared unseeing at the wall opposite. He had been an operative with the Pacifists for more than three years now. He was, he realized, probably their senior hatchetman. An agent could hardly expect to survive so long. It was against averages.

It was then that the screen of his telephone lit up.

Senator Phil McGivern's face glowered at him.

Warren Casey started, stared.

McGivern said, coldly, deliberately, "The building is surrounded, Casey. Surrender yourself. There are more than fifty security police barring any chance of escape."

The Pacifist's mind snapped to attention. Was there anything he had to do? Was there anything in the apartment that might possibly betray

the organization or any individual member of it? He wanted a few moments to think.

He attempted to keep his voice even. "What do you want, McGivern?"

"My son!" The politician was glaring his triumph.

"I'm afraid Fredric is out of my hands." Casey said. Was the Senator lying about the number of police? Was there any possibility of escape?

"Then whose hands is he in? You have him, Warren Casey, but we have you."

"He's not here," Casey said. There might still be a service he could perform. Some way of warning the organization of McGivern's method of tracking him down. "How did you find me? How do you know my name?"

McGivern snorted. "You're a fool as well as a criminal. You sat in my office and spoke in the accent of your native city. I pinpointed that, immediately. You told me you'd been a bomber pilot and obviously had seen action, which meant you'd been in the last war. Then as a pseudonym you used the name Jakes. Did you know that persons taking pseudonyms almost always base them on some actuality? We checked in your home city, and, sure enough, there was actually a newspaperman named Jakes. We questioned him. Did he know a former bomber pilot, a veteran of the last war? Yes, he did. A certain Warren Casey. From there on the job was an easy one - criminal. Now, *where is my son?*"

For a moment, Warren Casey felt weary compassion for the other. The Senator had worked hard to find his boy, hard and brilliantly. "I'm sorry, McGivern. I really don't know." Casey threw his glass, destroying the telephone screen.

He was on his feet, heading for the kitchen. He'd explored this escape route long ago when first acquiring the apartment.

The dumbwaiter was sufficiently large to accommodate him. He wedged himself into it, slipped the rope through his fingers, quickly but without fumbling. He shot downward.

In the basement, his key opened a locker. He reached in and seized the submachine pistol and two clips of cartridges. He stuffed one into

a side pocket, slapped the other into the gun, threw off the safety. Already he was hurrying down the corridor toward the heating plant. He was counting on the fact that the security police had not had sufficient time to discover that this building shared its central heating and air-conditioning plant with the apartment house adjoining.

Evidently, they hadn't.

A freight elevator shot him to the roof of the next building. From here, given luck, he could cross to a still further building and make his getaway.

He emerged on the roof, shot a quick glance around.

Fifty feet away, their backs to him, stood three security police agents. Two of them armed with automatic rifles, the other with a handgun, they were peering over the parapet, probably at the windows of his apartment.

His weapon flashed to position, but then the long weariness overtook him. *No more killing. Please. No more killing.* He lowered the gun, turned and headed quietly in the opposite direction.

A voice behind him yelled, "Hey! Stop! You—"

He ran.

The burst of fire caught Warren Casey as he attempted to vault to the next building. It ripped through him and the darkness fell immediately.

Fifteen minutes later Senator Phil McGivern scowled down at the meaningless crumpled figure. "You couldn't have captured him?" he said sourly.

"No, sir," the security sergeant defended himself. "It was a matter of shoot him or let him escape."

McGivern snorted his disgust.

The sergeant said wonderingly, "Funny thing was, he could've finished off the three of us. We were the only ones on the roof here. He could've shot us and then got away."

One of the others said, "Probably didn't have the guts."

"No," McGivern growled. "He had plenty of guts."

Some years ago I wrote a Sherlock Holmes pastiche and sent it to Tony Boucher, founder and long-time editor of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. *He liked the story but was horrified I had made some errors in my Holmesian terminology and such. He suggested that we turn the story over to a loyal member of the Baker Street Irregulars (Boucher was one himself) and present the yarn as a collaboration. The late August Derleth, a mutual friend, was chosen. At that time he was doing a series of Holmes takeoffs, using the names Solar Pons and Dr. Parker, instead of Holmes and Watson. Eventually we did two or three of these together.*

The Adventure of the Snitch in Time

with August Derleth

(Being a recently discovered, hitherto unpublished reminiscence of Dr. Lyndon Parker of 7B Praed Street, London)

ON AN AUTUMN AFTERNOON of a year that, for manifest reasons must remain nameless, there came to the attention of my friend Mr. Solar Pons a matter which was surely either the most extraordinary adventure ever to befall a private enquiry agent in or before our time, or an equally extraordinary misadventure, the *raison d'être* of which remains obscure even now, though it might have been born in the circumstances of the moment, for it was one of those days on which London was literally swallowed in a yellow fog, and we had both been confined to our quarters for two days with no more incident than the

arrival of an occasional paper and the unfailing complaint of our long-suffering landlady about Pons' spare appetite

Even our warm and comfortable quarters for all that a fire burned at the hearth, had begun to pall on us Pons had exhausted the microscope, he had abandoned his chemistry set he had ceased his abominable pistol practice and for once there was not a single item of correspondence transfixed to the center of the mantelpiece by his knife He had hardly stopped his restless wandering among the disorderly order of our quarters, and seated himself in his velvet lined chair holding forth on the points of difference between Stradivarius and Amati violins when he rose once more with his empty pipe in his hands

He was at the fireplace, about to take the shag from the toe of his slipper, tacked below the mantelpiece, when suddenly he paused He stood so for a moment, in utter silence, his hawklike face keen with interest, his body seeming actually to lean forward as if to catch the sound that smote upon his ears

"If I am not mistaken, Parker " he said with unaccustomed gravity, "we are about to have a most unusual visitor '

I had been standing at the window looking out and had just turned "Nothing has disturbed this fog for the past half hour," I protested

"My dear Parker you are looking in the wrong direction The footsteps are approaching from out there, and a little above "

So saying, he turned to face the door with alert expectation in his gray eyes

I had for some time been conscious of a curious sound almost as of water sliding at regular intervals against the roof Apparently this was what Pons had mistaken for the sound of footsteps Almost at the same moment of this realization, a most peculiar assault was made on the door to our quarters I had not heard the outer door, in truth I had heard no step upon the stair But now a kind of brushing sound broke in upon us, it began at the top of the door, and did not become a recognizable knock until it had descended to midpanel

Being nearest the door, I moved to open it

"Pray be cautious, Parker " said Pons "And spare me your alarm Unless I am in egregious error, our visitor is from another world "

I gazed at him, mouth agape I had heard and marveled at his extraordinary deductions before, but this came from his lips with such

calm assurance that I could not doubt his sincerity even while I could not accept his words.

"Come, Parker, let us not keep him waiting."

I threw open the door. There, confronting us, was a strong, healthy man, bronzed by the sun, clad in a fantastic attire of such brilliant hues as to dazzle the eye. His footgear — a strange combination of sandal and slipper — must have made the curious slapping sounds I had first mistaken for the dripping of water, but which Pons had correctly identified as footsteps, however alien to our previous experience.

Our visitor looked briefly at me and said, "Ah, the famous literary doctor, I presume?" and smiled, as if in jest.

My astonishment at this manner of address, accompanied as it was with an almost insolent amusement, left me momentarily speechless.

"Come in, come in, my dear fellow," said Pons behind me. "Pray overlook Dr. Parker's rudeness. I perceive you have come a long way, your fatigue is manifest. Sit here and relieve yourself of the problem which brings you to these quarters."

Our visitor walked into the room, inclining his head to acknowledge Pons' invitation.

"I hope you will forgive my coming without an appointment," he said, in a somewhat stilted voice, accompanied by florid and Victorian gestures. "I fear I had no alternative. Let me introduce myself. I am Agent Tobias Athelney of the Terra Bureau of Investigation, Planet Terra, of the Solar System League."

Pons' eyes twinkled merrily.

"My dear sir," I could not help interrupting, "levity is all very well, but this is neither the time nor the place for it. Just where are you from?"

Our visitor had taken the seat to which Pons had waved him. At my words, he stopped short, took a small violet-covered notebook from an inner fold of his robelike costume, and thumbed through it until he found the place he sought.

"Pray forgive me," he murmured. "If we were still using your somewhat fantastic calendar system, it would be the year 2565 AD."

Pons, who had been scrutinizing him closely, now leaned back, closed his eyes, and touched his fingertips together. "So you represent

yourself as a governmental agent of almost 700 years in the future, Mr Athelney?" he said "A traveler in time"!

Our visitor grimaced "Not exactly Mr Pons To my knowledge there is no such thing as time travel nor can such travel ever be developed No, the explanation for my presence here is more elementary We have recently discovered that the universe is not indeed, one but of an infinite number We have learned that everything that possibly *could* happen *has* happened *will* happen, and *is* happening Given an infinite number of alternative universes you can easily understand how this would be so To illustrate, Mr Pons, there are alternate space-time continua in which Napoleon won at Waterloo, there are still others in which Waterloo was a draw and there are yet others in which the battle was never fought at all indeed, in which Napoleon was never born!"

I flashed a glance of mounting indignation at Pons, but my companion's face had taken on that dream expression I had learned to associate with intense concentration Surely it could not be that he was being deceived by this patent mountebank!

"Infinite other universes than this," murmured Pons, "containing other persons identical to myself, and to Dr Parker, here who carry on their little lives in much the same manner as we do?"

Our visitor nodded "That is correct Mr Pons There are still other space-time continua in which there are no such persons as yourselves, never have been, and never will be " He coughed almost apologetically "In fact in this multitude of alternative universes, Mr Pons, there are some in which you two are fictitious characters, the product of a popular writer's art!"

"Amazing!" exclaimed Pons, adding with a glance to my dour face "and yet not entirely incredible, would you say, Parker?"

"Preposterous!" I answered "How can you sit there and calmly accept this—this nonsense?"

"Dear me," murmured Pons, "let us not be too hasty, Parker "

"I am sorry to have upset Dr Parker," said our visitor soberly, "but it is from just such a universe that I have traveled to this Approximately 700 years before my birth in my space-time continuum, a series of stories dealing with Mr Solar Pons and Dr Lyndon Parker were written, presumably by Dr Parker, and became the all-time favorites of the literature of deduction "

"Let us assume all this is so," said Pons. "For what purpose have you come?"

"To consult you, Mr. Pons."

"I fancied as much," said my companion with a serene smile. "Though it would seem a long chance indeed to consult a fictitious character."

"Touché!" answered our client. "But a fictitious character in *my* universe and 700 years before my time. But in *this* universe you are very real indeed and the greatest detective of all time!" He sighed. "You cannot imagine, Mr. Pons, the difficulty of first finding a continuum in which you were *real*, and then, on top of that, one in which you were contemporary."

Pons sat for a moment in silence, stroking the lobe of his left ear. "I submit," he said at last, "since patterns of crime and its detection continually evolve, you are haunting the wrong continuum, Mr. Athelney."

"I think not, Mr. Pons, if you will hear me out."

"Proceed."

"One of our most scientifically advanced bands of criminals is named the Club Cerise after the favorite color of its leader. Moriarty. They—"

"Moriarty!" exclaimed Pons.

"Yes, Mr. Pons. Moriarty. The name is familiar to you, perhaps?"

"Indeed it is!" Pons was silent for a moment, his eyes closed. "You know, Parker," he said after a moment, "I have always felt that one death at the Reichenbach was as false as the other." He sat up in his chair, his gaze now intent on our visitor. "Pray continue, Mr. Athelney! Where my illustrious predecessor could achieve but a stalemate, it seems that you offer me the opportunity for complete victory!"

"Well, then, Mr. Pons," our visitor resumed. "You will not be surprised to learn that Moriarty and his band have managed to escape retribution for some time, and it is in regard to their apprehension that I seek your assistance. The criminal method they have developed is based on the same discovery that allows my presence here. Moriarty and his Club Cerise have been making a practice of invading space-time continua in less developed eras than our own, and utilizing our most advanced weapons and devices to assure their escape, have

been despoiling these universes of their art treasures Not long ago, for example, they went into a Twentieth-Century universe and obtained a da Vinci, a half dozen Rembrandts, and a priceless collection of Kellys."

Pons' eyes widened a trifle "You are suggesting that the Irish have developed an artist of the stature of da Vinci, Mr Atheiney?"

"Indeed, yes A fellow named Kelly created a work of genius called *Pogo*, which appeared in hundreds of newspapers of his day These were *Pogo* originals, including some of the very rare pre-strip drawings With his fabulously valuable treasure, Moriarty and his band managed to return to our own space-time continuum Obviously, we cannot punish them in our universe, since they have committed no crime there Under ordinary circumstances, it would be possible to extradite them to the universe they plundered but there are almost insurmountable complications "

Pons smiled, still giving no evidence of being in the slightest troubled by the mad, if ingenious, account of our prospective client "I daresay 'insurmountable' is the word to describe the problems attendant upon extradition of a group of criminals from a country which doesn't exist in the universe where the crime was committed I submit that a Twentieth-Century nation might be compelled to adopt extraordinary protective measures if indeed these would be adequate to deal with criminals seven centuries in advance of the police of that period " But now he shook his head with a gentle smile on his thin lips "But we must stop considering these ramifications, or we shall soon find ourselves involved in the higher mathematics of space and time."

"The importance of the problem is greater than might at first be evident," continued our visitor "Given continued success on the part of Moriarty and his Club Cerise there can be no doubt that other such bands will soon emulate them and that eventually endless numbers of space-time pirates will give up other pursuits to devote themselves to the plundering of weaker continua with this type of snitch "

"Snitch?" I repeated

"Elementary, Parker " murmured Pons impatiently "Obviously idiomatic for 'theft'."

"The ultimate possibility will not have escaped you, Mr Pons," continued our client "Sooner or later, the increasing numbers of criminals would arrive in *this* space-time continuum and in *this* era "

I could not be sure, but it seemed to me that at this suggestion a little color drained from Pons' cheeks And, if a shudder went through that lean frame, he was again under perfect control within moments He sat then in silence, his eyes closed, his head sunk to his chest with his fingertips gently tapping together.

Our visitor waited in silence

Pons opened his eyes presently and asked, "Pray tell me, Mr Athelney do you have income taxes in your world?"

Athelney groaned. "My dear fellow, last year my taxes were unbelievably high Bureaucracy runs rampant!"

"Capital, capital!" exclaimed Pons "Why not prosecute Moriarty for tax evasion?"

Our visitor shook his head dolefully "The criminals of our day are advanced, Mr Pons They *pay* their taxes."

Once again Pons retreated into silence, taking time now to light up his calabash But this time his silence was broken more quickly

"I have some modest knowledge of British law, Mr Athelney," said Pons, "but your laws may well differ What type of social system prevails in your world and time?"

"It is usually referred to as Industrial Feudalism "

"I am not familiar with the term, though I can guess its meaning Pray elucidate."

"In the same manner that Feudalism evolved from Chattel Slavery, and Capitalism from Feudalism, so Industrial Feudalism has evolved in our continuum from Capitalism Ownership has contracted until a few princes of finance, a few industrial barons and lords of transportation completely control the government and practically all the wealth."

"Do national boundaries still prevail?"

"Terra is united, but we have loose ties with the other planets of the Solar System."

"Then doubtless you have tariff laws between the various planets "

"Very rigid ones Last month we apprehended some Martians smuggling duppl berries; they were given ten years "

"I submit you have an obvious trap in which to take Moriarty and his Club Cerise Mr Athelney They must pay import taxes on those art objects Failure to do so puts them atou. of the law "

Our client smiled broadly "I do believe Mr Pons you have arrived at a solution of our problem "

He came to his feet.

"I suggest your government pass such tariff restrictions as to make imports from other space-time continua prohibitive Such a move, in view of the fact that the criminals of your time are so advanced as to pay their taxes, would in all likelihood prevent further depredations "

Though our client was manifestly anxious to be off, he hesitated "I wish there were some way in which I could remunerate you Mr Pons Unfortunately, we do not use the same system of exchange All I can do is offer profound thanks in the name of my continuum "

"There is surely remuneration enough implied in the promise that we will not be victimized here in our time and world by such as Moriarty," said Pons "But stay Mr Athelney I perceive you are still troubled by some aspect of the matter "

Our client turned from the threshold to which he had walked He smiled wryly "I fear, Mr Pons that this is but the initial step in our problem Moriarty, when he learned I was to travel hither in search of the greatest detective of all time, took certain protective measures He sent one of his own men to another space-time continuum to acquire the services of a most astute lawyer named Randolph Mason "

"Pray be reassured " responded Pons instantly "I can refer you to a rising young contemporary, who promises to be even greater, and is gaining a challenging reputation in the legal circles of his world By an odd coincidence, not uncommon to fiction, he bears a similar family name His given name, I believe, is Perry My correspondents on the west coast of the United States have given me flattering reports of his talents You will find him in Los Angeles, I believe I commend him to your government Good afternoon, Mr Athelney "

As soon as the door had closed behind our visitor, I turned to Pons "Should not one of us slip after him and notify the authorities of his escape?"

Pons walked to the window and looked out into the fog Without turning, he asked, "You thought him a lunatic, Parker?"

"Surely that was obvious!"

"Was it indeed!" Pons shook his head "I sometimes think, Parker, that that happy faculty for observation which seems to come so readily to me encounters obstacles of demoralizing stubbornness in you "

"Pons!" I exclaimed hotly, "you cannot have been taken in by this this mountebank and his hoax?"

"Was he both lunatic and mountebank, then?" asked Pons, smiling in that superior manner which always galled me

"What does it matter which he was? He was certainly one or the other."

"If a mountebank, what was his motive? If a lunatic, how did he find his way here in this fog, which is surely as thick as any we have ever had? I fear some of us have an unhappy tendency to dismiss the incredible solely because it is incredible to *us* Tell me Parker, have you ever contemplated setting forth in the form of fiction these little adventures of mine in the field of ratiocination?"

I hesitated to answer.

"Come, come, Parker, it is evident that you have "

"I confess, I have thought of it "

"You have not yet done so?"

"No, Pons, I swear it."

"You have spoken of your plans to no one?"

"No."

"Our late client spoke of you as a literary doctor, 'The famous literary doctor' were his exact words, I believe If he were but a lunatic or mountebank, as you will have him, how came he then to know of your innermost hope and ambition in this regard? Or is there some secret communion between lunatics and mountebanks? I perceive, thanks to our Mr Athelney, that, without regard to my wishes, you are destined to become a literary man at the expense of my modest powers."

"Pons, I swear I have never put pen to paper," I cried

"But you will, Parker, you will! May I remind you of my distinguished predecessor's credo, that when all possible explanations have been shown false, the impossible, no matter how incredible, alone remains? This, I fancy, is one little adventure you will not be able to chronicle without a furtive blush or two "

In this, at least, my companion was correct

Long before Star Trek *came down the ways I anticipated the trials and tribulations of the* Enterprise *with those of the* New Taos. *The series ran in the pulps in the early 1950's. I don't know whether Gene Roddenberry ever read any of them but in 1968 I was chosen to do the first novelization of the TV series. It was a juvenile entitled* Star Trek Mission to Horatius *and sold for 69¢ in such outlets as Woolworth's and supermarkets. I imagine it's the best seller I've ever had. I got more fan mail than for everything else I've written put together — all from teens and pre-teens. Like a damn fool I'd sold all rights for a flat sum and got no royalties.*

Doctor's Orders

LIEUTENANT JOHNNY NORSEN THREW down his cards in disgust. "That does it," he snapped, his angular face peevish. "From now on canasta is out as far as I'm concerned. Dick here sits next to me and draws six wild cards to my one. What good is a game that's nine-tenths luck?"

Dick Roland tossed his own cards to the tiny wardroom table and stifled a yawn. "It's pretty early in the cruise to begin swearing off games, Johnny."

Ensign Mart Baker said listlessly, "Well, we might as well give up canasta. The skipper has already sworn off playing it and Doc Thorndon wouldn't start in the first place. How about going back to poker?"

Johnny Norsen grunted, "Poker's no good without stakes, and the regulations are strict about gambling in space."

"Craziest regulation in the books," Bakr snorted "Hand me the game book off that shelf, Dick Maybe we can find something new "

Dick Roland reached up above him, secured the copy of *1001 Popular Games Down Through the Ages*, and tossed it to the space cruiser's third officer.

Bakr thumbed through it lackadaisically "Pingpong," he said "What's pingpong?"

Johnny Norsen said, "That's one where you've got to have a little table to bat a little ball back and forth We don't have the room "

"Oh, yeah," Bakr mumbled "Let's see, somebody marked gin rummy here When did we play that?"

"Cruise before last Got fed up with it; irritated the skipper so bad he nearly came down with cafard "

"Ummmmm High-Low-Jack-and-the-Game "

"That's another one where if you don't have stakes it's not interesting."

Mart Bakr kept thumbing through the pages "They've got some of the damnedest games here Ever hear of hotfoot?"

Nobody was interested enough to reply but he went on "They played it back during the middle of the Twentieth. The guy who's playing finds somebody who's asleep or in some other manner unaware of what's going on He puts a match in the side of the unsuspecting one's shoe and — "

"What's a match?" Norsen asked disinterestedly

"An early form of cigarette lighter," Dick Roland told him "They had a chemical preparation on the end of a small piece of wood You rubbed the head against some hard object and it broke into flame "

The first officer snorted "Sounds awfully complicated How many times would one work before it was used up?"

"I don't know."

"Listen to this," Mart Bakr commanded "This is what they considered a game back in the Twentieth The player puts the match in the other's shoe and sets fire to it When it burns down to the foot, the victim jumps up howling and trying to get the shoe off to ease the pain It says here: 'This afforded considerable amusement to all spectators.'"

"Who in kert compiled that book?" Johnny Norsen asked "Next thing they'll have a description of the Chinese Water Torture as a game."

Dick Roland got to his feet and stretched hugely "The author was really reaching when he included that one," he said "Anyway, I'm tired. I think I'll go in and chew the rag with Doc Thorndon awhile "

Mart Bakr tossed the book to the table "Yeah, I'm on watch in half an hour anyway Maybe I'll kill that much time reading "

Johnny Norsen complained bitterly "Reading what? We've all read everything on the *New Taos* three times over "

Dick Roland grinned back at them over his shoulder as he worked his way to the door "Why don't you go up to the skipper's quarters and give Mike Gurloff a hotfoot? That'd wake things up around here "

Doc Thorndon was lying on the bottom bunk in the ship's hospital The room was about the size of a bedroom of a Pullman of the Twentieth Century It had two bunks, a tiny folding table, a medicine chest built into the titanium-alloy wall, a lavatory The hospital also doubled as the doctor's quarters, if he had two patients at once, he had to leave his place and bunk with the third officer but that was seldom

He looked up from his book as the navigation officer entered "Hello, Dick," he said easily, "Draw up a pillow and lie down " The doctor was a little, cheerful, roly-poly man, his cheeks still pink but his hair thinning and graying He looked about forty-five old for the Space Service.

Dick Roland hoisted himself into the top bunk, sprawled on his back, tucked his hands under his head and stared up at the ceiling

"Game over?" the doctor asked casually

"Uh huh."

"Who won?"

"I don't know. Forgot."

The doctor went back to his book but there was a trace of frown on his good-natured face.

After some minutes of silence, Dick Roland said, "You know, Doc, we're the two most worthless members of this crew "

Thorndon tucked a finger in the book to mark his place and considered that. "Oh, I don't know," he said. "Nobody does much on a space cruiser, not the way they did in the days of the surface vessels back on Earth. You take the cook. Once they were mighty important — good cooks — but now what do they do? Ninety-nine percent of their work is automatic. And take the signalmen. We have two aboard, but here we are on a patrol that will last a year, and there's hardly a possibility that we'll use any of our various methods of signaling until we get back to the Solar System and the trip's practically over. The same thing applies to everyone else. Even Commander Gurloff hasn't enough to keep him busy an average of more than a half hour a day. Everything's automatic — everything."

"Uhhhhh," Dick Roland said, "but if and when we need them we need them bad, any of them. Suppose something went wrong with the automatic chef? The cook would have to take over."

Doc Thorndon shuddered.

"No, seriously, Doc. You and I are the least necessary members of the crew. As long as I've been on the *New Taos* I've only had to do any navigating once, and — nothing personal, of course — actually, what in the world good is a ship's doctor any more? What do you do except maybe give one of the men a penicillin shot every so often to keep him from having headaches for the next six months?"

"Each one of us has a use," the doctor protested, "and when we're needed, we're needed bad. Take, for instance, the time the Kadauto-pilot was knocked out in that fight with the Kraden cruiser and you had to figure out a course back to the Solar System."

"Yeah," Dick Roland snorted, "once in fifty years something like that might happen. What is it *you* do once every fifty years, Doc?"

Doc Thorndon scratched the end of his nose reflectively. "Oh, I don't know. It's pretty important to keep space cafard from hitting a ship, and the way boredom's growing, it looks as though it might become a problem. We should never have been ordered out on this patrol so soon after the last. The men didn't have time to rest."

It was Dick Roland's time to shudder.

An enlisted man stuck his head in the door. "Doc," he asked, "you haven't seen the skipper around, have you?"

"Not for more than an hour. Isn't he on the bridge?"

"No, sir. You didn't see him, did you, Lieutenant?"

Dick Roland shook his head "Not recently What did you want him for, Spillane?"

"Wanted to report a funny-looking animal aboard, Lieutenant Saw him up forward a little while ago "

Both the doctor and the navigator came to their elbows "A what?" Thorndon asked.

The messman demonstrated "A little brown animal, about this long and maybe this high, Doc Half a dozen of us spotted him up in the crew's galley Nobody'd ever seen one before, not even in a zoo "

Dick Roland swung around in the bunk and let his knees hang over the side "What'd it look like, Spillane? Earth type, Martian, Venusian—"

"It looked like an Earth animal, sir Four legs, a head eyes, nose, mouth Yeah, it was an Earth-type all right Kind of blinked at us when it saw us watching, and scampered off real quick "

Doctor Thorndon was scowling. He came to his feet "Come along with me, Spillane We'll see if we can locate it in the encyclopedia " He started for the corridor.

"Hey, wait for me, Doc," Roland called "Imagine an animal being on board!"

On the way they passed a burly noncom gunner who was listlessly touching up a spotless space rifle "Hey, messman," he called "what's this about some of you guys in the galley seeing an animal?"

"That's right," Spillane said, proud of the attention he was drawing, "we're going to check up on it now "

The noncom chuckled "Animals he's seeing Brother, let me tell you, you're coming down with the cafard, but bad "

Spillane looked anxiously at the doctor after they'd passed out of earshot of the gunner "You don't think that's it, do you, Doc?"

Thorndon shook his head kindly "Not if several of you saw it Don't let it worry you Hallucinations don't appear in space cafard until the final stages You haven't shown the early symptoms as yet "

They made their way into the wardroom, Spillane remaining near the door, uncomfortable at being in officers' country

Johnny Norsen looked up from the chess problem he was trying half-heartedly to solve "What's up?" he asked little interest in his voice

Dick Roland motioned with his head at the enlisted man "Spillane

here, and two or three others claim to have seen some small animal in the ship's galley."

"No kidding?"

"I'll be a makron," Bart Bakr put in. "What kind of animal?"

Doctor Thorndon had taken one volume from a long shelf that held similar ones. "None of them could identify it," he said, thumbing through the pages. "Ah, here." He took the book over to Spillane. "Is this what you saw?" He indicated an illustration.

"Yeah, yeah," Spillane said happily. "That's it. What is it, Doc?"

Doctor Thorndon rubbed his nose with a forefinger and scowled. "It's a rat," he said. "You can go now, Spillane. Uh — just a moment. Tell the crew that I offer fifty credits reward for anyone who'll bring it to me alive."

"Fifty credits?" The messman was impressed. He scurried out of the room breathlessly.

"A rat?" Johnny Norsen muttered. "What in the world is a rat and what would it be doing on a ship?"

"Here it is," the doctor said. He read: "'Rat. Original habitat, Earth. A large rodent belonging to the genus *Mus*. Commonly brown or black, sometimes with a gravish tinge, they vary in length from about seven to ten inches. Very prolific mammals, they produce from twenty to fifty young a year' — well, that isn't important unless there're two or more of them. Let's see — 'Supposedly originating in China, they spread through Europe in the Middle Ages and, still later, to America by way of ship. Highly destructive of grains, foods, and soiled clothing, they are occasionally vicious enough to attack human beings. Their greatest menace is as disease carriers, the bubonic plague of the tropics being spread by them.'

"Well, that was in the old days," Thorndon mused. "Let's see, here we are: 'Now extinct except for a few laboratory specimens on Earth, a small number still exists in the wild state on Venus where it is believed they were taken inadvertently in the early space freighters.'"

"Hey, that's probably where we picked it up," Mart Bakr said. "Just before we took off from there."

"This is interesting, Doc," Johnny Norsen said, "but why'd you tell Spillane you'd give fifty credits for him?"

Doc Thorndon closed his book and looked up at the first officer. "He's worth it," he said. "The things are priceless back on Earth. In

the early Twenty-Second Century, in their zeal for exterminating the pest, people practically eliminated the species, which was unfortunate in a way because they're invaluable as laboratory animals They're exceedingly like man, you know "

"Are you kidding?" Norsen asked.

"What's like a man?" a new voice growled

They looked up at the entrance of burly Commander Mike Gurloff "And what's this I hear about a rat being on the ship, and what's a rat anyway?"

Doc Thorndon went over the matter briefly for the skipper

"I'll lay you two to one, we picked him up on Venus, all right," Gurloff growled "Doesn't make any difference, give the men something to do What was this about it being like a man? I thought you said it was only ten inches long "

"They're omnivorous, like man " Thorndon explained, "and very adaptable They can eat anything and live in any climate that men can An example is the fact that they were even able to adapt themselves to Venus "

"Lnnnn?" Gurloff said He'd lost interest already "Well, probably one of the crew will pick him up for you in short order " He walked over to the viewer and peered into it with ennui "I'm getting to the point where I wouldn't mind if we ran into a Kraden ship, anything to break this monotony I'd bet my left arm we'll all be down with cafard before the cruise is half over."

Mart Bakr said suddenly "You know, I think I'll take a crack at catching that rat myself What'd I bait a trap with if I made one, Doc?"

The doctor shrugged "I think they're supposed to like cheese in particular," he said.

Johnny Norsen scratched the back of his head "If you tuned a stun gun all the way down you could probably knock him over without killing him I wonder where he's hanging out? Maybe in the galley stores in the Number Eight compartment "

"Listen " Gurloff growled at his first officer "I'll bet every man in the crew who isn't on watch is down in the Number Eight compartment, trying to catch the rat Don't you go down there with a stun gun I'd lay you two to one you'd wind up blasting some enlisted man "

Norsen was disappointed, but he grinned amiably. "Okay, Skipper," he complied. "But fifty credits is fifty credits."

During the next two or three months the rat was spotted half a dozen times, but no one claimed the fifty credits. A score of methods were devised to root the rodent out, but none of them was successful. Stun guns, traps, knock-out drops in food that should have been considered delectable by a rat—none of them worked.

It was Ensign Mart Bakr who christened him Arthur, and it was Taylor, a jetman second class, who played a guitar and was considered the ship's wit, who began the composition of "The Saga of Arthur, the Space Rat." He left the last stanza free, explaining that it was reserved for Arthur's fate.

It was suggested once or twice that Arthur be made the ship's mascot if and when captured. But to have a rat for the ship's mascot you first have to catch the rat, and Arthur wasn't having any.

In the third month after Arthur had first been spotted, enthusiasm about his presence on the *New Taos* had died considerably. Except for a few diehards who continued to dream up new plans for his capture, the crew decided that the elusive rat had found some hiding place which was practically foolproof. They gave up, fifty credits or no fifty credits.

The next chapter in the career of Arthur began in the officers' mess during the fourth month after his discovery.

They were at dessert when Mart Bakr asked listlessly, "Doc, how does it feel to have a case of catard, a real hang up case?"

The doctor finished chewing his last bite before answering, but his eyes had narrowed imperceptibly. "Never had it, so I wouldn't know. Not so good, though."

Bakr said, "Sometimes I think I'd like to get a case, just to have something different to do."

Johnny Norsen said, "That reminds me of the guy in the weather station on Phobos. It was so monotonous and drab, and so irritatingly quiet, that one day he reached down and broke his own arm, just to hear it snap."

"All right, knock it off," Gurloff growled. "It's getting to the point

on this ship where the only topic of conversation is space cafard, space cafard, space cafard. You'd think the ship was riddled with it. Actually we haven't had a case for — for the last six cruises. Since Doc Thorndon came aboard, as a matter of fact."

"Ummmm," the doc said, reaching for a toothpick. "I've been lucky."

"I still wonder how it'd feel," Bakr said morosely. "Anything'd be better than this—"

"Don't be so sure," the doctor said softly. "For one thing, you'd never want to hit space again. You'd never be able to drag yourself onto a spacecraft, never be able to stand free fall, never—"

"You mean that's bad?" Johnny Norsen grinned.

There was a knock at the door and the head of a crew member cautiously made itself evident.

"Well, Spillane?" Mike Gurloff growled.

"Wanted to see the doctor, sir," Spillane explained. "About the rat," he added.

"What about the rat?" Doc Thorndon asked, not showing much interest. "Somebody spot Arthur again? Where? What was he doing?"

"He was running down the corridor, Doc. Not running, exactly — kind of dancing."

Doc Thorndon came to his feet suddenly, spilling his cup of coffee. "What!"

"He was dancing, like, Doc," the messman said in surprise. "Real funny. Taylor and me almost caught the little makron."

"Excuse me, gentlemen," Thorndon said tightly. He dropped his napkin to the table and brushed his way hurriedly from the room, and headed for the ship's library.

"What's wrong with the doc?" Bakr asked. "He looks like he's seen a ghost."

Gurloff grunted. "Acts like he's got cafard himself."

Dick Roland ran his tongue over suddenly dry lips. "Bubonic plague," he said.

They all looked at him.

"What was that?" Norsen asked, a scowl on his homely face.

"I was reading up on rats the other day. They carry bubonic plague. When they have it themselves, they act queer, sometimes they dance."

Commander Gurloff came to his feet suddenly and made his way down the corridor after Thorndon the rest following him.

Thorndon was flipping through the pages of a volume of the *Encyclopedia Galactica*, he found his page and hurriedly traced a finger down a column. He didn't hear the others come in behind him until Gurloff growled, "Well, what is it, Doctor?"

Doc Thorndon didn't look up, but he read aloud. "'Bubonic Plague, also called the Black Death from the dark buboes or swellings which accompany it. In the past the disease cost the deaths of millions, particularly in the Middle Ages. Caused by the *Bacillus pestis* which is transmitted by the rat-flea, its symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, hemorrhages, swelling of joints and discoloration of the skin. The disease lasts from one to thirty days and is usually fatal. It has been completely unknown on Earth since the disappearance of the rat in the Twenty-Second Century, but cases have been reported periodically on Venus in the past few centuries. The vaccine is always effective.'"

Gurloff growled, "What in kert does it mean, Thorndon? Is there any chance —"

Doc Thorndon's face was wan. "If that elusive rat has bubonic plague, Commander, I—I—"

Gurloff snapped, "What if he has? We'll just have to give the crew shots for —"

A muscle twitched in the doctor's face. "Captain, there hasn't been bubonic plague on Earth since the Twenty-Second Century. I haven't any vaccine."

There was a long pregnant silence.

Finally, Mike Gurloff said softly, "What will we have to do, Doc?"

Doc Thorndon ran his eyes from one to the other of them, to Johnny Norsen, to Mart Bakr, to Dick Roland, finally back to the Captain. "We've *got* to destroy that animal." He came to his feet. "How much longer is the cruise to last, skipper?"

Mike Gurloff ran a weary hand over his bullet head. "About four months, we're on our way home now."

Doc Thorndon said, "If you ever expect to see it again, find Arthur. We may all be dead before the *New Taos* gets back to Terra, but even if we aren't we'd never see home until that rat is dead."

Gurloff growled, "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that there hasn't been any bubonic plague on Earth for centuries, and the *New Taos* most certainly wouldn't be allowed to land until—"

"Holy jumping Wodo," Mart Bakr blurted, "this gets serious!"

Gurloff shot his eyes around at his three officers. "Roland," he snapped, "I have considerable confidence in you. You're in charge of Operation Arthur. Requisition any equipment or men you need. *Get that rat!*"

"Yes, Sir!"

Operating with considerable assistance from Doctor Thorndon, Lieutenant Dick Roland went about Operation Arthur with desperate thoroughness.

Every man in the crew was armed with a stun gun. Orders were to shoot on sight. Arthur was no longer wanted for the laboratories on Earth, or for a ship's mascot. Arthur was Public Enemy Number One and he was wanted dead.

All crew members were issued clothing which could be tied tightly about the cuffs and even at the collar—protection, it was hoped, against the rat-flea and its deadly bacillus. Disinfectant was spread about the ship with abandon.

The search of the *New Taos* was taken over by a carefully selected crew of twenty—half the ship's complement. Every square inch was explored. Roland and his men progressed from one compartment to another, searching each room with a care that would have made impossible the hiding of a cockroach.

After each compartment was searched, its spacetight doors were locked, nor were they allowed open again until there were several other *safe* compartments between it and the unsearched balance of the ship.

Operation Arthur went on slowly, ruthlessly, carefully. It began in the nose of the ship, on the bridge, and combed back toward the stern.

The work went on with the full cooperation and sympathy of the entire ship's company. Gambling was taboo in space, but it was known that there was a pool among the men on just when Arthur would bite the dust. The ship's clerk even mimeographed a bulletin on the progress of the search. Interest reached a peak.

Finally, one day, Dick Roland, attired in the uniform of the search, cuffs tied tight, stun gun at his belt entered the wardroom and snapped Commander Mike Gurloff a salute.

"Eh?" the Commander grunted. "Got him, huh? Where was he, Dick? Bet you two to one it was in some food storage."

Dick Roland moistened his lips. "Sir, we searched every compartment in the ship—"

"I know you did, son. Fantastic, the thoroughness of it all. Unnecessary to go into detail. Where in kert was the little makron?"

"We didn't find him, sir."

Commander Mike Gurloff came to his feet like an enraged bull. "What!"

Dick Roland said hurriedly, "Sir, I have one last plan that can't fail."

The skipper's face was a dark red. He snapped, "Very well, Lieutenant. This is taking ridiculously long; get on with it."

Roland hesitated. Then, "Sir. My plan was to saturate the ship with chlorine gas."

"What!"

"Yes, sir. The whole ship, every compartment, every room, every nook and cranny, with chlorine gas."

Mart Bakr snorted. "It isn't bad enough that we're threatened with first space cafard and then bubonic plague. Dick wants to gas us."

The navigator pushed his point hurriedly. "Sir, the whole crew can be put into spacesuits and remain in them for three hours. In that time we can fill the ship with gas. Wodo knows where Arthur has managed to hide himself, but wherever it is, the gas will get him. After three hours, we can blow the ship clean with the ventilating system and be safe to discard the spacesuits."

Mike Gurloff stared at him for a long moment.

Doctor Thorndon spoke up. "It sounds like a reasonable plan to me, Captain."

"All right," Gurloff growled finally. "But when we get back to Earth I don't want this to get out, understand. We'd be the laughing stock of the fleet if it was known to what extent we went to kill an animal no bigger than—than—"

"Arthur," Johnny Norsen supplied. "The last rat to ever travel aboard a ship, and his ancestors are probably proud of him."

Commander Mike Gurloff glared at his first officer.

So they donned their spacesuits, those men of the intrepid Solar System Space Service, and they deluged their ship with the deadly green gas. They permeated it. They let it soak into every corner and crevice for three full hours. Then they blew it clear.

When they climbed from their suits, officers and men, they looked sheepishly at each other. It had been a long fight and they had won, but somehow they weren't proud of their victory. They knew that somewhere, in his remote hiding place, Arthur was dead, but they found little satisfaction in the fact. It was as though a respected adversary had been conquered, and conquered by superior weight of numbers, by trickery, by double-dealing, not by honest warfare.

A toast was drunk to Arthur's death in the officers' wardroom. And in the crew's quarters, a tractorpedo was tapped for some grain alcohol and a mess of jungle juice was brewed. All listened respectfully when Taylor sang the last stanza of "The Saga of Arthur, the Space Rat."

Which should be the end of this story, but it isn't.

With the passing of Arthur, the ship drifted back into its routine, and in a week's time, except for occasional nostalgic conversations about Operation Arthur, the space rat was forgotten. Lethargy was again the word and the monotony of space travel flung its drab cloak once again over the *New Taos*.

Over the mess table one night (night in that it was the third meal of a twenty four-hour period, and the clock registered 1800 hours) Gurloff rapped suddenly. "What shape's the crew in, Doctor?"

Thorndon looked up from his food and appeared thoughtful. "A couple more of the men were in today with early symptoms of catarrh, Captain."

Mike Gurloff grunted. "We've only a month to go. You'd think the prospect of getting home would hold them."

The doctor said earnestly, "Captain, when we do get back, I think your report should contain a particularly strong comment upon the

advisability of sending men out on patrols without a substantial rest period between. Perhaps I should have said, when *and if* we get home."

"What do you mean by that?" Gurloff growled.

"Cafard is a mental sickness, not a disease. This monotony, this boredom, has affected us all. I'm afraid that in such a state it might be contagious. If one man goes berserk, the whole ship's company might follow."

The commander snorted in disgust. "You're overstating it. Perhaps half a dozen of the men are on the verge of—"

The doctor raised a plump hand and interrupted softly, "That tic in your eye, Commander, is a symptom. You'd better drop into the hospital for a few minutes after your next watch. There isn't too much we can do to stave off space cafard, but you'd better take what treatment the ship affords."

Mike Gurloff stared at him first angrily, but his belligerence melted. He got up from the table slowly, like a tired old man, and left the room.

Mart Bakr twisted a bread roll to crumbs nervously. "This is piling up," he complained.

A sudden roar emanated from the depths of the ship, and those remaining in the mess hall scrambled to their feet.

"What in kert goes on?" Johnny Norsen snapped. "What're the makrons shouting?" He made his way hurriedly toward the door, followed by Bakr and Roland.

They could make it out finally, "Arthur. *Arthur!*"

"Holy Wodo, they've gone batty," Bakr snapped, his eyes wide. "What're they—"

Spillane tramped up the corridor, his face flushed with excitement. "It's Arthur. They saw Arthur again down in the jetroom. He's still alive! Arthur's still alive!"

It was all-out warfare then. Before, the campaign against Arthur had been pursued coldly, carefully and passionlessly. The rat was a potential danger, a threat to the whole ship, and he was ruthlessly to be destroyed. If anything, there was considerable sympathy for the rodent.

Now it was different An emotional crisis seemed to seize upon every man aboard Everyone's time, from captain to messman, everyone's interest was settled on the killing of Arthur Groups, pairs, solitary hunters roamed the ship at all hours, armed to the teeth and seeking, red-eyed, the elusive rat

It was beyond humor now They were nearing Earth and they needed desperately to land, to escape the confinement in the tiny spaces of the space cruiser They needed to see wives, sweethearts, families, to get drunk, to gamble, to see the sky above them, to swim in water, to hike over the countryside The very thought of being confined indefinitely under quarantine against bubonic plague drove them to frenzy.

Arthur was spotted thrice in the first week, and escaped desperately each time, the roars of the men behind him

He fell the second week of the wild hunt for him Knocked down by a half-dozen stun guns when he ventured into an ambush in compartment eight, he was quickly dashed to the ship's incinerator The men who had approached and handled him were rushed in turn to the hospital and all efforts made to disinfect them

Somehow, it didn't seem real It didn't seem possible that Arthur could be dead Like his legendary enemy, the cat, his lives had seemed endless.

They put into New Albuquerque not long afterward

Doc Thorndon was lying in the bottom bunk in the ship's hospital just as they were coming in for the landing

He looked up from his book as Dick Roland entered

"Hello, Dick," he said easily "Draw up a pillow and lie down "

The navigator hoisted himself into the top bunk, sprawled out on his back and tucked his hands under his head

"I figured out where Arthur was hidden," he said casually

"Oh? I thought you might How?"

"Various things mostly by remembering some of the things that've been said during this cruise."

There was interest in the doctor's voice now "Such as?"

"Well, for one thing, the skipper saying there hadn't been a case of space cafard on board this ship since you were appointed ship's

doctor. Then I remembered all the information you had about rats and bubonic plague, you'd come up with things like the fact that they liked cheese, but that information wasn't in the *Encyclopedia Galactica*. That seemed a bit strange. Another thing seemed off, too. I studied up on bubonic plague and quite a few things were different than they should have been.

"So then I remembered another conversation. It was Mart Bakr telling us about a game they used to play in the Twentieth Century. It was called a hotfoot. It came to me, Doc, that that's what this ship got, a *mental* hotfoot. We were shocked out of our potential space cafard by the threat of bubonic plague."

There was a long silence between them. Finally Roland said, "You must have got a kick out of those acts you put on. Where'd you have him hid, Doc?"

"In the bottom drawer of the medicine kit, mostly. In my coat pocket during the gassing." Thorndon added wistfully, "I had Arthur pretty well trained. You should have seen him dance, Dick. I found him myself there on Venus, hated to sacrifice him."

He sighed deeply. "I wonder how in kert I'm going to keep this damn crew from getting cafard next time."

When John Campbell wrote the introduction for this story in Analog, *he said, "This might not be science fiction, but it's fun." Later, when he included it in the yearly* Analog *anthology, he pointed out that the basic premise was correct. The Seminole Indian Nation is still legally at war with the United States. No treaty has ever been signed. Some of the fan reviewers took umbrage at the light treatment of an admittedly very serious question. I could have referred them to my wife, who thought it funnier than hell. Jeanette is an Amerind.*

Good Indian

MORTIMER DOWLING OPENED ONE eye accusingly and said, "Miss Fullbright, I thought we had a standing agreement that I was never to be bothered while in conference."

Millie said, "Take your feet off the desk, you'll scratch it. Am I or am I not your receptionist?"

"You am. Now go away. It was very drunk out last night."

"A receptionist recepts and..."

Mortimer Dowling opened the other eye, too, and interrupted. "No, she doesn't," he said severely. "You don't do enough crossword puzzles. A *recept* is an idea formed by the repetition of similar percepts, as successive percepts of the same object. A receptionist does something else. I forget what. Go away. I'm tired."

"... And when someone comes into my office asking for an appointment to see the Director of the Department of Indian Affairs, then it's my duty to so inform you."

He closed both eyes and snorted. "Don't be ridiculous."

"Three of them," Millie said definitely

Mortimer Dowling said sleepily "Three what? Why don't you go away? Go away and do a crossword puzzle or something."

"Three Indians to see you, sir," Millie said formally

The head of the Department of Indian Affairs opened both eyes again and said severely, "Miss Fullbright, I am in no mood for jest. You know very well that there is no such thing as three Indians. The last Indian died almost ten years ago. The President proclaimed a day of national mourning. I made a speech. It was a very sentimental. Are you going away or not?"

Her mouth tightened. "They say they're Indians. And they look like Indians. I've seen pictures of Indians."

Mortimer Dowling blinked. "You're serious?"

"Of course, I'm serious."

"Three men in the outer office, and they say they're Indians?" A certain tremor was coming into Mortimer Dowling's voice.

She nodded definitely.

"Good Heavens," said the Director of Indian Affairs. "For nearly fifteen years I've held this job, and my father before me. By the terms of the final Indian treaty there must always be a Department of Indian Affairs so long as the United States shall endure, the original idea being that the Indians would always have somewhere to go to find justice. It never occurred to those who compiled the treaty that the Indians would eventually blend into the rest of the population. The last bit of business conducted by the department was almost a half century ago. Miss Fullbright, do you realize what you're saying? *There's actually something for me to do!*"

"Yes, sir," said Millie, overwhelmed by it all. "What shall I tell them?"

Mortimer Dowling sat up straight behind his desk, businesslike. "Now, just what was it they wanted?"

"An appointment."

He thought about that. "Well, we should give them one, Miss Fullbright. Yes, indeed. An appointment."

Millie was impressed by the new aggressive men of her superior. "Very good, sir," she said.

"Mark it down on the calendar, Miss Fullbright."

"Yes, sir. When do you wish to make this appointment, sir?"

He thought about that. Finally, decisively, "Now."

"Right now?"

"Right now. They might go away and not come back."

"Yes, sir."

There were three of them all right and they came in assorted sizes ranging from a six-footer pushing three hundred pounds to a five-footer pushing ninety pounds. The one in the middle averaged out neatly.

Mortimer Dowling shook hands with enthusiasm. "You have no idea how pleasant it is to meet you chaps," he said. "Our records show that the last full-blooded Indian died ten years ago. Where have you been keeping yourselves? Miss Fulbright, chairs for these gentlemen."

When they were seated, Mortimer Dowling looked them over happily. They were Indians all right, all right. You could see they were real Indians.

Mortimer Dowling said, "Yes, sir, a real pleasure. Now then, what can we do for you? The Department of Indian Affairs places its full resources at your disposal, gentlemen."

The one in the middle said, "We're Seminoles. We've come to sign a treaty."

Mortimer Dowling's face went blank. "Seminoles?" he said. "A treaty?"

They gave him one concerted nod, lapsed back into frozen-faced silence. Oh, they were Indians all right.

Mortimer Dowling cleared his throat. "Look here, the government of the United States cleared up all its Indian difficulties over a century ago. We signed final treaties with every tribe."

"Except the Seminoles," the one in the middle said. "We represent the Seminoles." He indicated his hefty companion to the right. "This is Charlie Horse and I'm Fuller Bull, and—"

"You're *what*?"

"Who, not what," the Indian said strictly. "I'm Fuller Bull."

"Oh." Mortimer Dowling said. "I thought you said—Never mind." He looked at the small one and tried to place the conversation back on a lighter level with a *bon mot*. "And I suppose this is Chicken Little."

"And this is Osceola the Eighteenth," Fuller Bull said. "We call him Junior."

Junior spoke up for the first time "For your information, the three of us took our LL D's at Harvard We carry powers of attorney for all fifty five of the other surviving members of the Seminole tribe "

"*Fifty-five?*" Mortimer Dowling was astounded "You mean there are fifty-five more of you?"

"Correct," Charlie Horse said "And we've come to sign a treaty between the Seminole Nation and the United States of America "

Already Mortimer Dowling was beginning to feel a bead of very cold sweat forming on his forehead He said anxiously, "Miss Fullbright Please The file on the Seminole Indian Nation "

"Yes, sir," Millie said She scooted out Came scooting back in mere moments, a thin file held in both hands She put the file before him

Mortimer Dowling renewed his information on the Seminoles quickly Scanned paper after paper Emitted occasional grunts Finally he looked up at them in satisfaction

"Now," he said definitely, "I don't know what your game is, but it won't work More than a century ago, the whole world went through a period of settling its difficulties with its minorities World opinion grew so strong that not a major power on earth dared do otherwise Why, even the Sino-Soviet Complex freed its satellites of course, by that time there was nobody left in the satellites except good commies, so they immediately applied for readmission However, that's beside the point The point is that the United States reviewed every dealing we had ever had with every Indian tribe Settling all the Indian questions beggared the United States treasury, but we satisfied them all every tribe, every member of every tribe " He let his eyes go ceilingward for a moment "As I recall, the hardest to please were the Delawares There were only three hundred seventy-five of them left, and they got a million dollars apiece "

"Peanuts," Charlie Horse said

"I beg your pardon?"

"Peanuts," said Charlie Horse.

Mortimer Dowling thumped the papers before him with an emphatic fingertip "When we attempted to contact the Seminoles we found there were none to contact They were all gone The only ones we could find were along the Tamiami Trail and at Silver Springs selling baby alligators and souvenirs made in Japan to the tourists It

turned out they were all Armenians, making an honest living. No Seminoles left."

"We went underground," Junior said.

Mortimer Dowling gaped at him. "What?" he said.

"We went underground," Junior told him. "We realized that the longer we could put off our final settlement with the government, the better off we'd be. Look at history. The great powers start off by butchering the aborigines of the countries they conquer. Then, as time goes by, their conscience begins to hurt and they make wards of those that are left. More time goes by and they begin to wax really sentimental. They seek out the very last survivors and load them with honors, with privileges, sometimes with positions superior even to their own citizens. Look at the British and the Tasmanians, The New Zealanders and the Maoris, the Swiss in Switzerland."

Millie cleared her throat. "What happened to the Swiss?"

"Finally there were so many more tourists in the country than Swiss that they began to thin out. Like the Chinese used to do, with invaders, only sort of in reverse. The tourist hordes interbred with the Swiss until finally you couldn't find a full-blooded one. The last man who could yodel died in Bern, twenty years ago."

Mortimer Dowling said severely, "Let's get back to the point."

"The point is," Charlie Horse said, "that the United States has no treaty with the Seminole Indian Nation. We didn't sign up when everybody else did. We realized the tribe would benefit more if we hid out, kept secret our existence, put off signing for a full century."

There was another bead of sweat on Mortimer Dowling's forehead. He said weakly, "I assume you have proof that you can prove that your fifty-eight Seminoles are all full-blooded Indians?"

Junior said, "We've planned this, remember, for a whole century. We've studied every aspect. There are no loopholes by which you can escape. The United States is the only nation on earth that has not settled its problems with all its minorities. You can imagine the impact of public opinion upon you, if this hits the world's headlines."

Mortimer Dowling said hoarsely, "I have before me the treaty we had prepared a hundred years ago. It offers every Seminole one hundred thousand dollars to settle all claims against the United States."

Fuller Bull chuckled his sarcasm. Junior and Charlie Horse didn't even bother to do that.

Mortimer Dowling said, "I'll up it. I'll promise you the same as the Delawares got. A million dollars apiece for every man, woman and child in the tribe."

They gave him the oatmeal look.

Mortimer Dowling said desperately, "What do you *want*?"

"Florida," said Junior.

"Florida!"

"Florida," Junior said. "We owned it originally and we've never signed it away."

"Do you realize that half a billion people now live in Florida? Do you realize how much money the citizens of this country have invested in the Florida peninsula in the past three centuries? Why, the bridge to Havana alone—"

"We're going to make it a toll bridge," Fuller Bull said with satisfaction.

"And we're going to confiscate every house, every orange tree, every motel in the state," Charlie Horse added. "I get Miami."

"Miami!" Mortimer Dowling repeated, trying to hold on to reality.

"That's my share," Charlie Horse told him.

"Good Heavens," Mortimer Dowling said.

"We're going to make every white man move out of the state," Charlie Horse wound up, with satisfaction.

Mortimer Dowling blurted, "You'll never get away with this. It's impossible."

Fuller Bull said darkly, "If necessary, we'll take our case to the Reunited Nations."

"The RN?" Mortimer Dowling said in despair. "We wouldn't stand a chance. There's not a country in the RN that hasn't already cleared itself of every taint of colonialism and imperialism. Why, the very expressions have become bad words."

The three Seminoles were smug.

Mortimer Dowling looked at his watch. "See here, gentlemen, let's not be hasty about this."

"So who's being hasty?" Junior said. "We've waited a hundred years for this moment."

"Well, see here, we needn't rush into things. It's time for lunch. Will

you gentlemen be my guests? Ha ha, on Uncle Sam, of course. Do you realize this will make quite a precedent? In my fifteen years as head of this department, I've never before had the occasion to submit an expense account."

The three Seminoles exchanged glances.

"Why not?" said Junior.

In the morning Mortimer Dowling opened one bloodshot eye and said, "Miss Fullbright, please go away. I'm dying."

Millie said, "Take your feet off the desk. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"No. Go away. I need rest."

"Just look at yourself," Millie said disgustedly. "The first time in fifteen years at this job you get something to do, and what happens? You blow up. Instead of trying to figure out an answer, you go get yourself stoned. Absolutely stoned."

Mortimer Dowling grunted. He pointed with his finger at an official-looking document lying on the desk. "Do you see that, Miss Fullbright? One of the most brilliant pieces of work done by an American official in the past century."

"Heavens to Betsy, the treaty. And all three of their signatures on it. How in the world did you ever ..."

Mortimer Dowling allowed himself a self-satisfied leer. "Miss Fullbright, haven't you ever heard the old saying, *The only good Indian is a dead—*"

Millie's hand went to her mouth. "Mr. *Dowling*, you mean ... you put the slug on all three of those poor Seminoles? But ... how about the remaining fifty-five of them? You can't possibly kill them all!"

"Let me finish," Mortimer Dowling growled. "I was about to say, *The only good Indian is a dead drunk Indian.* If you think I'm hanging over, you should see Charlie Horse and his wisenheimer pals. Those redskins couldn't handle firewater back in the old days when the Dutch did them out of Manhattan with a handful of beads and a gallon of applejack, and they *still* can't. Now, go away and do a crossword puzzle, or something."

As mentioned elsewhere in this volume, every SF writer worth his salt has, sooner or later, to come up with a new departure on the time travel theme. It's a challenge. It's been done so often that it's practically impossible not to duplicate a twist that's already been written. Here's my attempt.

Compounded Interest

THE STRANGER SAID IN miserable Italian, "I wish to see Sior Marin Goldini on business."

The concierge's manner was suspicious. Through the wicket he ran his eyes over the newcomer's clothing. "On business, Sior?" He hesitated. "Possibly, Sior, you could inform me as to the nature of your business, so that I might inform his *Zelenza*'s secretary, Vico Letta . . ." He let his sentence dribble away.

The stranger thought about that. "It pertains," he said finally, "to gold." He brought a hand from his pocket and opened it to disclose a half dozen yellow coins.

"A moment, *Lustrissimo*," the servant blurted quickly. "Forgive me. Your costume, *Lustrissimo* . . ." He let his sentence dribble away again and was gone.

A few moments later he returned to swing the door wide. "If you please, *Lustrissimo*, his *Zelenza* awaits you."

He led the way down a vaulted hall to the central court, to the left past a fountain well to a heavy outer staircase supported by Gothic arches and sided by a carved parapet. They mounted, turned through a dark doorway and into a poorly lit corridor. The servant stopped and drummed carefully on a thick wooden door. A voice murmured from within and the servant held the door open and then retreated.

Two men were at a rough-hewn oak table. The older was heavy-set, tight of face and cold, and the other tall and thin and ever at ease. The latter bowed gently. He gestured and said, "His *Zelenza* the Sior Marin Goldini."

The stranger attempted a clummy bow in return, said awkwardly "My name is... Mister Smith."

There was a moment of silence which Goldini broke finally by saying, "And this is my secretary, Vico Letta. The servant mentioned gold, Sior, and business."

The stranger dug into a pocket, came forth with ten coins which he placed on the table before him. Vico Letta picked one up in mild interest and examined it. "I am not familiar with the coinage," he said.

His master twisted his cold face without humor. "Which amazes me, my good Vico." He turned to the newcomer. "And what is your wish with these coins, Sior Mister Smith? I confess, this is confusing."

"I want," Mister Smith said, "to have you invest the sum for me."

Vico Letta had idly weighed one of the coins in question on a small scale. He cast his eyes up briefly as he estimated. "The ten would come to approximately forty-nine zecchin, *Zelenza*," he murmured.

Marin Goldini said impatiently, "Sior, the amount is hardly sufficient for my house to bother with. The bookkeeping alone—"

The stranger broke in. "Don't misunderstand. I realize the sum is small. However, I would ask but ten percent, and would not call for an accounting for—for one hundred years."

The two Venetians raised puzzled eyebrows. "A hundred years, Sior? Perhaps your command of our language—." Goldini said politely.

"One hundred years," the stranger said.

"But surely," the head of the house of Goldini protested, "it is unlikely that any of we three will be alive. As God desires, possibly even the house of Goldini will be a memory only."

Vico Letta, intrigued, had been calculating rapidly. Now he said, "In

one hundred years, at ten percent compounded annually, your gold would be worth better than 700,000 zecchini."

"Quite a bit more, if I am not mistaken," the stranger said firmly.

"A comfortable sum." Goldini nodded, beginning to feel some of the interest of his secretary. "And during this period, all decisions pertaining to the investment of the amount would be in the hands of my house?"

"Exactly." The stranger took a sheet of paper from his pocket, tore it in two, and handed one half to the Venetians. "When my half of this is presented to your descendants, one hundred years from today, the bearer will be due the full amount."

"Done, Sior Mister Smith!" Goldini said. "An amazing transaction, but done. Ten percent in this day is small indeed to ask."

"It is enough. And now may I make some suggestions? You are perhaps familiar with the Polo family?"

Goldini scowled. "I know Sior Maffeo Polo."

"And his nephew, Marco?"

Goldini said cautiously, "I understand young Marco was captured by the Genoese. Why do you ask?"

"He is writing a book on his adventures in the Orient. It would be a well of information for a merchant house interested in the East. Another thing. In a few years there will be an attempt on the Venetian government, and shortly thereafter a Council of Ten will be formed which will eventually become the supreme power of the republic. Support it from the first and make every effort to have your house represented."

They stared at him and Marin Goldini crossed himself unobtrusively.

The stranger said, "If you find need for profitable investments beyond Venice, I suggest you consider the merchants of the Hanse cities and their soon to be organized League."

They continued to stare and he said, uncomfortably, "I'll go now. Your time is valuable." He went to the door, opened it himself and left.

Marin Goldini snorted. "That liar, Marco Polo."

Vico said sourly, "How could he have known we were considering expanding our activities into the East? We have discussed it only between ourselves."

"The attempt on the government" Marin Goldini said, crossing himself again "Was he hinting that our intriguing is known? Vico, perhaps we should disassociate ourselves from the conspirators"

"Perhaps you are right, *Zelenza*" Vico muttered He picked up one of the coins again and examined it back and front "There is no such nation" he grumbled, "but the coin is perfectly minted" He picked up the torn sheet of paper, held it to the light "Nor have I ever seen such paper, *Zelenza*, nor such strange language, although on closer examination, it appears to have some similarities to the English tongue."

The House of Letta-Goldini was located now in the San Toma district, an imposing structure through which passed the proceeds of a thousand ventures in a hundred lands

Riccardo Letta looked up from his desk at his assistant "Then he really has appeared" *Per favore* I.o bring me the papers pertaining to the, ah account Allow me a matter of ten minutes to refresh my memory and then bring the Sior to me"

The great-grandson of Vico Letta head of the House of Letta-Goldini, came to his feet elegantly bowed in the sweeping style of his day said, "Your servant, Sior "

The newcomer bobbed his head in a jerky, embarrassed return of the courtesy said "Mister Smith"

"A chair, *Illustrissimo*' And now pray pardon my abruptness One's duties when responsible for a house of the magnitude of Letta-Goldini..."

Mister Smith held out a torn sheet of paper His Italian was abominable "The agreement made with Marin Goldini exactly one century ago."

Riccardo Letta took the paper It was new, clean and fresh, which brought a frown to his high forehead He took up an aged yellowed fragment from before him and placed one against the other They matched to perfection "Amazing, Sior, but how can it be that my piece is yellow with age and your own so fresh?"

Mister Smith cleared his throat "Undoubtedly different methods have been used to preserve them"

"Undoubtedly." Letta relaxed in his chair, placed fingertips together. "And undoubtedly you wish your capital and the interest it has accrued. The amount is a sizable one, Sior, we shall find it necessary to call in various accounts."

Mister Smith shook his head. "I want to continue on the original basis."

Letta sat upright. "You mean for another hundred years?"

"Precisely. I have faith in your management, Sior Letta."

"I see." Riccardo Letta had not maintained his position in the cutthroat world of Venetian banking and commerce by other than his own ability. It took him only a moment to gather himself. "The appearance of your ancestor, Sior, has given rise to a veritable legend in this house. You are familiar with the details?"

The other nodded, warily.

"He made several suggestions, among them that we support the Council of Ten. We are now represented on the Council, Sior. I need not point out the advantage. He also suggested we investigate the travels of Marco Polo, which we failed to do, but should have. Above all in strangeness was his recommendation that investments be made in the Hanse towns."

"Well, and wasn't that a reasonable suggestion?"

"Profitable, Sior, but hardly reasonable. Your ancestor appeared in the year 1300 but the Hanseatic League wasn't formed until 1358."

The small man, strangely garbed in much the same manner tradition had it the first Mister Smith had appeared, twisted his face wryly. "I am afraid I am in no position to explain, Sior. And now, my own time is limited, and, in view of the present size of my investment, I am going to request you have drawn up a contract more binding than the largely verbal one made with the founders of your house."

Riccardo Letta rang a small bell on his desk, and the next hour was spent with assistants and secretaries. At the end of that period, Mister Smith, a sheaf of documents in his hands, said, "And now may I make a few suggestions?"

Riccardo Letta leaned forward, his eyes narrow. "By all means."

"Your house will continue to grow and you will have to think in terms of spreading to other nations. Continue to back the Hanse cities

In the not too far future a remarkable man named Jacques Coeur will become prominent in France Bring him into the firm as French representative However, all support should be withdrawn from him in the year 1450."

Mister Smith stood up, preparatory to leaving "One warning Sior Letta As a fortune grows large the jackals gather I suggest the magnitude of this one be hidden and diffused In this manner temporary set-backs may be suffered through the actions of this prince, or that revolution, but the fortune will continue"

Riccardo Letta was not an overly religious man but after the other had left he crossed himself as had his predecessor

There were twenty of them waiting in the year 1500 They sat about a handsome conference table, representatives of half a dozen nations, arrogant of mien, sometimes cruel of face Waldemar Gotland acted as chairman.

"Your Excellency," he said in passable English, "may we assume this is your native language?"

Mister Smith was taken aback by the number of them, but "You may," he said

"And that you wish to be addressed as Mister Smith in the English fashion?"

Smith nodded "That will be acceptable"

"Then, sir, if you will your papers We have named a committee, headed by Emil de Hanse to examine them as to authenticity"

Smith handed over his sheaf of papers "I desired," he complained, "that this investment be kept secret"

"And it has been to the extent possible Excellency Its size is now fantastic Although the name Letta-Goldini is still kept, no members of either family still survive During the past century, Excellency, numerous attempts have been made to seize your fortune"

"To be expected," Mister Smith said interestedly "And what foiled them?"

"Principally the number involved in its management, Excellency As a representative from Scandinavia it is hardly to my interest to see a Venetian or German corrupt The Contract"

Antonio Ruzzini bit out, "Nor to our interest to see Waldemar

Gotland attempt it. There has been blood shed more than once in the past century, *Zelenza*."

The papers were accepted as authentic

Gotland cleared his throat "We have reached the point, Excellency, where the entire fortune is yours, and we merely employees As we have said, attempts have been made on the fortune We suggest, if it is your desire to continue its growth "

Mister Smith nodded here.

" that a stronger contract, which we have taken the liberty to draw up, be adopted."

"Very well, I'll look into it But first, let me give you my instructions."

There was an intake of breath and they sat back in their chairs.

Mister Smith said, "With the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, the Venetian power will drop The house must make its center elsewhere."

There was a muffled exclamation

Mister Smith went on "The fortune is now considerable enough that we can afford to take a long view We must turn our eyes westward. Send a representative of the fortune to Spain Shortly, the discoveries in the west will open up investment opportunities there Support men named Hernando Cortez and Francisco Pizarro In the middle of the century withdraw our investments from Spain and enter them in England, particularly in commerce and manufacture There will be large land grants in the New World, attempt to have representatives of the fortune gain some of them There will be confusion at the death of Henry VIII; support his daughter Elizabeth

"You will find, as industry expands in the northern countries, that it is impractical for a manufacturer to operate where there are literally scores of saints' days and fiestas Support such religious leaders as demand a more, ah, puritanical way of life "

He wound it up "One other thing This group is too large I suggest that only one person from each nation involved be admitted to the secret of the contract."

"Gentlemen " Mister Smith said in 1600, "turn more to manufacture and commerce in Europe, to agriculture, mining and accumulation of

large areas of real estate in the New World. Great fortunes will be made this century in the East, be sure that our various houses are first to profit."

They waited about the conference table in London. The clock, periodically and nervously checked, told them they had a full fifteen minutes before Mister Smith was expected.

Sir Robert took a pinch of snuff, presented an air of nonchalance he did not feel. "Gentlemen," he said, "frankly I find it difficult to believe the story legend. Come now, after everything has been said, what does it boil down to?"

Pierre Dellage said softly. "It is a beautiful story, *messieurs*. In the year 1300 a somewhat bedraggled stranger appeared before a Venetian banking house and invested ten pieces of gold, the account to continue for a century. He made certain suggestions that would have tried the abilities of Nostradamus. Since then his descendants have appeared each century at this day and hour and reinvested the amount, never collecting a *sou* for their own use, but always making further suggestions. Until now, *messieurs*, we have reached the point where it is by far the largest fortune in the world. I, for instance, am considered the wealthiest man in France." He shrugged eloquently. "While we all know I am but an employee of The Contract."

"I submit," Sir Robert said, "that the story is impossible. It has been one hundred years since our *Mr. Smith* has supposedly appeared. During that period there have been ambitious men and unscrupulous men in charge of The Contract. They concocted this fantastic tale for their own ends. Gentlemen, there is no Mr. Smith and never was a Mr. Smith. The question becomes, shall we continue the farce, or shall we take measures to divide the fortune and each go our own way?"

A small voice from the doorway said, "If you think that possible, sir, we shall have to work still more to make the contract iron-bound. May I introduce myself? You may call me Mr. Smith."

In 1800 he said, "You are to back, for twelve years, the adventurer Bonaparte. In 1812 drop him. You are to invest largely in the new nation, the United States. Send a representative to New York

immediately. This is to be a century of revolution and change. Withdraw support from monarchy "

There was a gasp from around the table

" .and support the commercial classes Withdraw all support of Spain in Latin America In the American civil war to come, back the North."

"Largely, gentlemen, this is to be the century of England Remember that " He looked away for a moment, off into an unknown distance. "Next century will be different, but not even I know what lies beyond its middle."

After he was gone, Amschel Mayer, representative from Vienna, murmured, "Colleagues, have you realized that at last one of The Contract relicts makes sense?"

Lord Windermere scowled at him, making small attempt to disguise his anti-semitism "What'd'ya mean by that, sir?"

The international banker opened the heavy box which contained the documents handed down since the day of Goldini He emerged with a medium-sized gold coin "One of the original invested coins has been retained all these centuries, my lord "

Windermere took it and read "The United States of America Why, confound it, man, this is ridiculous Someone has been a-pranking The coin couldn't have existed in Goldini's day, the colonies proclaimed their independence less than twenty-five years ago "

Amschel Mayer murmured, "And the number at the bottom of the coin I wonder if anyone has ever considered that it might be a date "

Windermere stared at the coin again "A date? Don't be an ass! One does not date a coin more than a century ahead of time "

Mayer rubbed his beardless face with a thoughtful hand "More than six centuries ahead of time, my lord "

Over cigars and brandy, they went into the question in detail Young Warren Piedmont said, "You gentlemen have the advantage of me Until two years ago I knew only vaguely of The Contract in spite of my prominence in the American branch of the hierarchy And, unfortunately, I was not present when Mr Smith appeared in 1900 as were the rest of you."

"You didn't miss a great deal," Von Borman growled. "Our Mr Smith, who has all of us tied so tightly with The Contract that everything we own, even this cigar I hold in my hand, is his — our Mr Smith is insignificant, all but threadbare."

"Then there actually is such a person," Piedmont said.

Albert Marat, the French representative, snorted expressively. "Amazingly enough, *messieurs*, his description, even to his clothes, is exactly that handed down from Goldini's day." He chuckled. "We have one advantage this time."

Piedmont frowned. "Advantage?"

"Unbeknown to Mr Smith, we took a photo of him when he appeared in 1900. It will be interesting to compare it with his next appearance."

Warren Piedmont continued to frown his lack of understanding and Hideka Mitsuki explained. "You have not read the novels of the British writer, the so clever Mr H. G. Wells?"

"Never heard of him."

Smith Winston, of the British branch, said. "To sum it up, Piedmont, we have discussed the possibility that our Mr Smith is a time traveler."

"Time traveler! What in the world do you mean?"

"This is the year 1910. In the past century science has made strides beyond the conception of the most advanced scholars of 1810. What strides will be made in the next fifty years, we can only conjecture. That they will even embrace travel in time is mind-twisting for us, but not impossible."

"Why fifty years? It will be a full century before —"

"No. This time Mr Smith informed us that he is not to wait until the year 2000 for his visit. He is scheduled for July 16, 1960. At that time, friends, I am of the opinion that we shall find what our Mr Smith has in mind to do with the greatest fortune the world has ever seen."

Von Borman looked about him and growled. "Has it occurred to you that we eight men are the only persons in the world who even know The Contract exists?" He touched his chest. "In Germany, not even the Kaiser knows that I directly own — in the name of The Contract, of course — or control possibly two thirds of the corporate wealth of the Reich."

Marat said, "And has it occurred to you that all our Monsieur Smith need do is demand his wealth and we are penniless?"

Smith-Winston chuckled bitterly. "If you are thinking in terms of attempting to do something about it, forget it. For half a millennium the best legal brains of the world have been strengthening The Contract. Wars have been fought over attempts to change it. Never openly, of course. Those who died did so for religion, national destiny, or national honor. But never has the attempt succeeded. The Contract goes on."

Piedmont said, "To get back to this 1960 appearance. Why do you think Smith will reveal his purpose, if this fantastic belief of yours is correct, that he is a time traveler?"

"It all fits in, old man," Smith-Winston told him. "Since Goldini's time he has been turning up in clothing not too dissimilar to what we wear today. He speaks English with an American accent. The coins he first gave Goldini were American double-eagles minted in this century. Sum it up. Our Mr. Smith desired to create an enormous fortune. He has done so and I believe that in 1960 we shall learn his purpose."

He sighed and went back to his cigar. "I am afraid I shall not see it. Fifty years is a long time."

They left the subject finally and went to another almost as close to their hearts. Von Borman growled, "I contend that if The Contract is to be served, Germany needs a greater place in the sun. I intend to construct a Berlin to Baghdad railroad and to milk the East of its treasures."

Marat and Smith-Winston received his words coldly. "I assure you, *monsieur*," Marat said, "we shall have to resist any such plans on your part. The Contract can best be served by maintaining the status quo; there is no room for German expansion. If you persist in this it will mean war and you recall what Mr. Smith prophesied. In case of war, we are to withdraw support from Germany and, for some reason, Russia, and support the allies. We warn you, Borman."

"This time Mr. Smith was wrong," Borman growled. "As he said, oil is to be invested in above all, and how can Germany secure oil without access to the East? My plans will succeed and the cause of The Contract will thus be forwarded."

The quiet Hideka Mitsuki murmured, "When Mr. Smith first

invested his pieces of gold I wonder if he realized the day would come when the different branches of his fortune would plan and carry out international conflicts in the name of The Contract?"

There were only six of them gathered around the circular table in the Empire State suite when he entered None had been present at his last appearance and of them all only Warren Piedmont had ever met and conversed with anyone who had actually seen Mr Smith. Now the octogenarian held up an aged photograph and compared it to the newcomer "Yes," he muttered, "they were right "

Mr Smith handed over an envelope heavy with paper "Don't you wish to check these?"

Piedmont looked about the table Besides himself, there was John Smith-Winston, the second, from England, Rami Mardu, from India; Warner Voss-Richer, of West Germany, Mito Fisuki, of Japan, Juan Santos, representing Italy, France and Spain Piedmont said, "We have here a photo taken of you in 1900, sir; it is hardly necessary to identify you further I might add, however, that during the past ten years we have had various celebrated scientists at work on the question of whether or not time travel was possible."

Mr Smith said, "So I have realized In short, you have spent my money in investigating me "

There was little of apology in Piedmont's voice "We have faithfully, some of us for all our adult lives, protected The Contract I will not deny that the pay is the highest in the world, however, it is only a *job*. Part of the job consists of protecting The Contract and your interests from those who would fraudulently appropriate the fortune. We spend millions every year in conducting investigations."

"You're right, of course. But your investigations into the possibilities of time travel...?"

"Invariably the answer was that it was impossible. Only one physicist offered a glimmer of possibility "

"Ah, and who was that?"

"A Professor Alan Shirey who does his research at one of the California universities We were careful, of course, not to hire his services directly. When first approached he admitted he had never considered the problem, but he became quite intrigued. However, he finally stated his opinion that the only solution would involve the

expenditure of an amount of power so great that there was no such quantity available."

"I see," Mr Smith said wryly "And following this period for which you hired the professor, did he discontinue his investigations into time travel?"

Piedmont made a vague gesture "How would I know?"

John Smith-Winston interrupted stiffly "Sir, we have all drawn up complete accountings of your property To say it is vast is an understatement beyond even an Englishman We should like instructions on how you wish us to continue "

Mr Smith looked at him "I wish to begin immediate steps to liquidate "

"Liquidate!" six voices ejaculated

"I want cash, gentlemen," Smith said definitely "As fast as it can be accomplished, I want my property converted into cash "

Warner Voss-Richer said harshly, "Mr Smith, there isn't enough coinage in the world to buy your properties "

"There is no need for there to be I will be spending it as rapidly as you can convert my holdings into gold or its credit equivalent The money will be put back into circulation over and over again "

Piedmont was aghast "But *why?*" He held his hands up in dismay "Can't you realize the repercussions of such a move? Mr Smith, you must explain the purpose of all this ..."

Mr Smith said, "The purpose should be obvious And the pseudonym of Mr Smith is no longer necessary. You may call me Shirey – Professor Alan Shirey You see, gentlemen, the question with which you presented me, whether or not time travel was possible, became consumingly interesting I have finally solved, I believe, all the problems involved I need now only a fantastic amount of power to activate my device Given such an amount of power, somewhat more than is at present produced on the entire globe, I believe I shall be able to travel in time."

"But, but *why?* All this, all this cartels, governments, wars . " Warren Piedmont's aged voice wavered, faltered

Mr Smith Professor Alan Shirey looked at him strangely "Why, so that I may travel back to early Venice where I shall be able to make the preliminary steps necessary for me to secure sufficient funds to purchase such an enormous amount of power output "

"And six centuries of human history," said Rami Mardu, Asiatic representative so softly as hardly to be heard "Its meaning is no more than this?..."

Professor Shirey looked at him impatiently

"Do I understand you to contend, sir that there have been other centuries of human history with more meaning'"

In checking back over the books submitted by former Boskone Guests of Honor, I find that a number of them have included never-before-published poetry. Not to be outdone in foisting off something I could never possibly sell, but would like to see in print, I'll conclude this volume with the only verse I can off hand remember having written.

Three Unanswerable Questions

Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?
— Juvenal

Who's to watch over the watchers,
Those who would carry the lashes?
What was the tune that Joshua played?
Who hauls the janitor's ashes?

This book was designed by D Christine Benders
set in Times Roman by Greg Thakar and
Chip Hitchcock at Typo Tech Reproduction
Center Inc with assistance from George Flynn,
Jim Turner Mark Olson and Alexis Layton,
printed on Booktext 55# natural offset by
BookCrafters Inc , of Chelsea Michigan

P9-DRM-613